

SI TH 57

THE VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLISM
AS UNFOLDED IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

By

DALE J. SIMONS

A.B., Augustana College, Sioux Falls, S. Dak.
B.Th., Luther Theological Seminary

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY
in
The Biblical Seminary in New York

New York, N. Y.
April, 1952

BIBLICAL SCHOOL OF
THEOLOGY LIBRARY
HATFIELD, PA.

17852 ✓

To my wife, Florence, whose Christian outlook,
faithful confidence, serene patience, and
sincere interest in the pastoral labors are
a constant inspiration, this study is
affectionately dedicated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	v
A. The Problem	v
1. The Problem Stated.	v
2. The Problem Delimited.	vii
3. The Problem Justified.	viii
B. The Method of Procedure	viii
C. The Sources of Data	x
I. THE APPROACH TO BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM	1
A. Introduction	1
B. Definition of a Symbol	2
C. The Purpose and Use of Symbolism in Interpretation	6
D. The Development of Symbolism in Religious Teaching	10
1. In the Jewish People's Training	10
2. In the Usage of Jesus	13
3. In the Usage of the Author of the Fourth Gospel	14
E. Summary	17
II. A STUDY OF SYMBOLS ILLUSTRATING THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF JESUS	19
A. Introduction	19
B. Selection of Symbolic Figures	20
C. Study of the Symbols	22
1. The Grain of Wheat:-Symbol of Sacrificial Giving	22
2. The Towel:-Symbol of Compassionate Action	27
D. Summary	33
III. SYMBOLS HAVING A BEARING UPON THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF CHRIST ,	34
A. Introduction	34
B. Study of the Symbols	35
1. The Lamb: Symbol of Sin-Bearing	35
2. The Bread: Symbol of Balanced Nourishment	39

Gift of Author

29406

May 22, 1952

Chapter	Page
3. The Light: Symbol of Complete Illumination	49
4. The Cross: Symbol of Available Life	59
C. Summary	62
IV. SYMBOLS ILLUSTRATING THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SAVIOUR WITH THE REDEEMED	64
A. Introduction	64
B. Study of the Symbols	64
1. The Shepherd and the Sheep: Symbol of Unquestioned Leadership	64
2. The Vine and Branches: Symbol of Productive Attachment	72
C. Summary	81
V. THE CONTRIBUTION OF SYMBOLISM TO THE IMPACT OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE	84
A. Introduction	84
B. The Significance of Symbolism in the Author's Understanding of Christ	85
C. Symbolism as an Aid Toward Effective Expression of the Author's Purpose in the Gospel	90
D. Symbolism as an Aid to the Reader's Faith in Christ	94
E. Summary	97
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	99
A. Summary	99
B. Conclusion	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	103

INTRODUCTION

THE VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLISM
AS UNFOLDED IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

A. THE PROBLEM

1. The Problem Stated

The message of the Bible is a message from God. It is a message of His claim upon man through creation and Redemption; a message of invitation to be born anew into the spiritual life through faith in the Son of God; a message of the significance of this call to a changed relationship with God in terms of eternal destiny. It is a message which does not enter naturally into the heart or thoughts of man, for none of the factors in the message are found in any scheme of religion invented by man himself. This is the more evident when it is considered that the impartation of knowledge which lies above the realm of natural reason can come to man only by revelation.

With relation to the message from God, man is confronted with the necessity, first of comprehending or understanding what the message signifies, and secondly of admitting or receiving the message to his own action and application. Further, since the message is concerned with invisible things outside the material world, its meanings cannot be transmitted directly,

but must be communicated through the medium of that which men already comprehend. The Scripture thus has a language of its own, in which the vocabulary of visible things has significance and incisive meaning in the revelation of the truths of the spiritual life. In the words of William Jones, an eminent eighteenth century theologian of the Church of England:

Words are the arbitrary signs of natural things; but the language of revelation goes a step farther, and uses some things as the signs of other things; in consequence of which, the world which we now see becomes a sort of commentary on the mind of God, and explains the world in which we believe.¹

"The world in which we believe," then, is a different world than that which is seen around us; a world which has no words capable of describing its imagery, for its essence is God, who is a Spirit; the spirit of man; and a spiritual world. Thus the Scripture has a basic purpose to impart these things which man neither sees nor knows by himself, but of which he must become aware through revelation. Consequently, as Mr. Jones states:

...Its style and manner must be such as are no where else to be found. It must abound with figurative expressions; it cannot proceed without them: and if we descend to an actual examination of particulars, we find it assisting and leading our faculties forward; by an application of all visible objects to a figurative use; from the glorious orb which shines in the firmament, to a grain of seed which is buried in the earth.²

1 Jones, William: A Course of Lectures on the Figurative Language of the Holy Scriptures, (London, G. H. H. and J. Robinson, 1789) p. 9.

2 Loc. Cit.

In the Gospel of St. John, as in other parts of Scripture, the use of figures often adds much to the profoundness of meaning, and makes transitions from the familiar objects of the world we know to the significance of the teachings about the things of the spirit. While the interpretation of the book does not depend so completely upon an understanding of its symbolism as, for instance, is the case with the apocalyptic message of the book of Revelation, a great deal of insight into the character of the Saviour may be gained from a study of the symbolism which is used in John's account of the life of Jesus.

It will be the purpose of this study to explore the Gospel with a view to discover some of the light which its symbolism throws on the character of Jesus Christ.

2. The Problem Delimited

Since many factors enter into the problem of interpretation, this study will not pretend to be an interpretative account of the Fourth Gospel, but only an attempt to discover some of the insights which a study of its symbolism may contribute to its interpretation.

Further, the study will be limited to a selection and classification of symbolic factors which contribute to the understanding of the Person and Work of Christ, and will make no claim to being a thorough and complete account of the symbolism in St. John. Any reference of this work to the symbolism in other books of the Bible will be purely illustrative.

3. The Problem Justified

Since the Scriptures make use of the vocabulary of the material world to so great an extent, to convey ideas and instruction concerning the spiritual, a thorough study of the symbolism of any part of the Bible should throw light upon its interpretation. In the Fourth Gospel the character of Jesus is delineated through a number of symbolic figures, which must be analyzed for their significance and contribution.

It is said of the Gospel of John that it is composed of the simplest words that may be found in speech, and at the same time it conveys the most profound meanings of any literature. Here, as a professor told his class, "any child can wade, but an elephant can swim." Out of the study of the Gospel and its significance, there is hope that any reader may find a link between this simplicity of language and the profoundness of spiritual insight. For there is a certain fascination in the symbolic, too, which draws one to ponder on the spiritual. When it is understood, the employment of the symbolic and figurative style contributes a great deal to the sublimity, majesty, vividness, and richness of the Scriptures.

B. THE METHOD OF PROCEDURE

As a foundation for the study of the symbolism of the Fourth Gospel, the basic principles and terminology will need to be understood. A definition of symbolism and the word, symbol; and

the fundamental purpose and use of symbolism will be discussed. Further, a historical development of the use of symbolism in religious teaching, particularly as affecting the training of the Jewish people, the teachings of Jesus, and the usage of the author of the Gospel, will be traced. All this material will be covered in the First Chapter.

An individual study of selected symbols in the Gospel of John and their use in illustrating fundamental areas of Christian experience, will be pursued according to the following classification:

Symbols illustrating the personal qualities of Jesus will be studied in Chapter II.

Symbols having a bearing upon the redemptive mission of Christ will be analyzed in Chapter III.

Symbols illustrating the relationship of the Saviour with His people will be the subject of Chapter IV.

The study of individual symbols will be followed by an analysis of their significance in aiding the effectual presentation of the total message of the Fourth Gospel. The significance of symbolism in the author's understanding of Christ; symbolism as an aid in successfully expressing the author's purpose in the Gospel; and symbolism as an aid to the reader's faith in Christ will be explored in Chapter V.

Chapter VI will consist of a general summary and conclusions reached.

C. THE SOURCES OF DATA

Every known source of information which will shed light upon the subject of study will be considered. The English versions of the Gospel of John will be the firsthand object of study, particularly with reference to the development of the individual symbols selected. The Gospel in the original Greek will be used as an auxiliary, although no attempt will be made at an original translation. Material for the general and historical sections will come from specific works on the general subject of symbolism; studies of Christian history; and other works, including books, commentaries, and encyclopedia articles.

CHAPTER ONE

THE APPROACH TO BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

CHAPTER I

THE APPROACH TO BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

A. INTRODUCTION

As has been pointed out, the entire Scripture, under the wisdom of God, has made use of things, such as signs, figures, and symbols, to explain its spiritual lessons which cannot be taught in any other words except those which are available to man for the description of his material and philosophic world. In applying this principle to the analysis of the message, it becomes necessary both to know how to select and identify the figurative, and to recognize the symbol when it occurs. It is also necessary to be acquainted with the purposes and uses of symbolism in interpretation; and with the historical development of the usage of symbolism in the Scriptures.

All that has been discussed up to now may be applied with a very broad connotation. Almost everything in the Scripture may be said to be figurative in one sense; that a spiritual application underlies even the most mundane experiences of man which are recorded in the sacred volume. With respect to symbolism as pertaining to this study, however, it is the intention to investigate only that class of symbols in which the inherent character of the earthly figure conveys specific information concerning the inherent character of that which is revealed as belonging to the spiritual world. In the Fourth

Gospel, the symbols will be definite figures which delineate the inherent character of Christ as the Divine Saviour.

With the limitations of the above paragraph, the general necessary knowledge concerning symbolism and its interpretation and application will be the subject of this chapter.

B. DEFINITION OF A SYMBOL

In defining the word, "symbol," it is found to mean a sign or token; a representation created by suggestion when a well known reality or idea of the familiar life is compared or considered in relation to an otherwise unexplainable characteristic of reality in the spiritual life. The work has its roots in two Greek words, σύν meaning with, and βάλλειν, to throw.¹ Hence the root idea is "to throw together," to describe an abstract idea by joining it with something familiar rather than through the use of precise synonyms or descriptive ideas. The visible sign, mark, or token serves to define or recall the abstract, not by exact resemblance, but by suggestion.²

It is cautioned that it is in no way necessary that the symbol shall partake of the nature of that which it represents. It is enough if in the symbol there is a general resemblance of some

1 New Century Dictionary, (New York, D. Appleton - Century Co., 1934)

2 Stafford, Thomas Albert: Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches, (New York-Nashville, Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1942) p. 17

of the properties of the represented truth or idea or personality.¹
Thus in everyday life common symbols are found: the red flag
by the side of the road or a red light at night as signs of danger;
the trade mark indicating a manufacturer's high quality goods;
the striped pole pointing out a barber shop.

None of these symbols are reproductions of the idea they convey, but only representations. This is an important factor in the study of symbolism, for there have been developments in the historic attitude toward symbols which have tended to increase their importance to the point where they are considered as facsimiles of that which they were originally intended only to suggest or represent.

Published definitions of symbols bear out this feature of their nature. Among these are found the following: "A symbol is a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction."²

A symbol is a visible or audible sign or emblem of some thought, emotion, or experience, interpreting what can be really grasped only by the mind and imagination by something which enters into the field of observation.³

"A symbol is a story told by a familiar sign that may be read at a glance."⁴

-
- 1 Wemyss, Thomas: A key to the Symbolical Language of Scripture, (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1840) pp. 1-2.
 - 2 Farbridge, Maurice H.: Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1923) p. 5.
 - 3 Hastings, James: Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), Vol. XII. p. 139.
 - 4 Webber, F. R.: Church Symbolism, (Cleveland, Ohio: J. H. Jansen, Publisher, 1927) p. v.

"A symbol means something presented to the senses that stands for and reminds us of something else. It is an outward and visible sign of an inner and spiritual reality."¹

"All sensuous things to which a higher meaning, aside from the natural significance, is attributed, are symbols."²

Louisa Twining, in her "Symbols and Emblems and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art," distinguishes between the symbol and the emblem. The symbol is considered as "something expressive of the whole being and character," e. g. the Lamb or the Good Shepherd are symbols but not emblems of Christ. The emblem, on the other hand is more expressive of an attribute or quality of the person or thing represented.³ However, her illustrations are not as clearcut as they might be in showing this division.

Thomas Wemyss also analyzes differences in terms in a word study of symbolism.⁴ He finds that the emblem differs from the symbol in that the resemblance it conveys is more arbitrary, and to some extent more fanciful. The type also differs in that its representation is that of something future, while the symbol represents something past or present.

-
- 1 Fleming, Daniel Johnson: Christian Symbols in a World Community, (New York: Friendship Press, 1940) p. 10
 - 2 Bennett, Charles W.: Christian Archaeology, (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1898) p. 72. (Quoted from Stafford, Thomas, A.: op. cit., p. 17)
 - 3 Twining, Louisa: Symbols and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art, (London: John Murray, Albermarle St., 1885) p. xiv.
 - 4 Wemyss, Thomas, loc. cit.

Thomas Stafford distinguishes also, between the symbol and a picture, in choosing the Cross as a symbol of Christ's death, but contending that a crucifix, "which represents the suffering Saviour hanging upon a cross, is not a symbol, but is, in effect, a picture."¹

The scope of the word is thus more or less strictly defined by the various authors who have applied themselves to the subject. Emphasis upon its various phases: Biblical, ecclesiastical, or classical symbolism, or its expression in art -- causes varying connotations upon the meaning of the word itself. For example, the definition of the term for someone studying this factor in the Bible would not always be identical with that of the student of Christian art.

Essential factors of the symbol may be said to be three:

1. A visible sign, mark, or token.
2. A spiritual reality or abstract idea, not exactly portrayable in material terms, with the implication of joining the visible and the abstract together.
3. The representation by suggestion of the spiritual or abstract, by the visible mark, or sign.

For the purpose of this study, the symbols will be considered within this frame of reference. Although some shade of distinction between the symbol and the emblem is recognized, the study will

1 Stafford, Thomas A., loc. cit.

not be aimed at any sharpness at that point. On the other hand, it will be dealing with definite symbols, as distinguished from the more general factors involved in figurative language, such as colorful speech, figures of speech, and the like.

C. THE PURPOSE AND USE OF SYMBOLISM IN INTERPRETATION

The frequent use of figurative language and symbols in the Scriptures is a procedure within the realm of that wisdom of God which makes His ways higher than man's ways. In the Prophets symbolism is the key to interpretation of many of their insights. The Saviour also instructed His hearers in this type of language, always making use of objects which were familiar to their experience.

The reasons for the emphasis upon the symbolic have been somewhat hinted at. Further consideration of its purposes in interpretation reveals the following:

First, the significance of objects and ideas familiar to the mind is necessary in order to understand or develop a concept of ideas or objects which are spiritual in nature, belonging to "the world in which we believe."

Second, the Scripture can speak under this form to some men, while others are not enlightened even though they are faced with the same words. While this feature of Scripture's illumination only through the Spirit's blessing is usually applied with reference to the insights received by the Christian saint

in contrast to the unbeliever, it may also be said to have a balancing effect upon the Christian life itself. Through Scripture's symbolism men are kept from running ahead of their growth in the Christian faith and life: or ahead of their understanding and insight into the significance of the revelation of God about His spiritual world.

Third, in times of peril to the Christian cause, the communication among the saints may be carried on in a sort of code -- understandable to believers but not to those intent on persecution. This is akin to what was stated above, but may more particularly account for at least a part of the Scriptural symbolism, since some of the Bible was written in such times of stress and crisis.¹

Fourth, outward signs give pledge and evidence of that which they signify. What a wonderful confirmation of the Gospel, for instance, has been the likeness of the shepherd applied to Himself by Jesus. How much explaining it would take, with what little effect,-- to say the same thing in abstract terms about the relationship between the Saviour and His people which is expressed in the symbol of the vine and the branches.²

Fifth, symbols and other figures "greatly sharpen the human intellect, afford food for serious meditations, and allure the mind to spiritual exercises...Had everything in Scripture been

1 Stafford, Thomas, A., op. cit., p. 18. See also Fleming, Daniel J., op. cit., p. 12.

2 Cf. Jones, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

dryly literal and plainly didactic, the Bible would have wanted half its charms."¹ Wemyss contends that all the various fields from which the Scripture's symbolism is chosen present a vast field of analogy which leads one into the habit of comparing and examining every object for its fruitful instruction in abstract and sublime truth. The result is that prejudices are divested, the spiritual character and joys of the Kingdom of God overcome earthly delights, and the motivation for real Scripture study is increased many fold.

The use of symbolism is not to be construed, however, as the complete freedom given to a wild, undisciplined imagination. Hence in interpretation, too, the symbols are not to be applied with rash disregard for all except the figure, but within the framework of all the major laws of interpretation. As Wemyss says: "All must be under the guidance of a sober, chaste, and pious judgment; afraid of giving forth that as divine truth, which has its origin only in human fancy."²

It must be considered, also, that the basic law of interpretation, that Scripture interprets Scripture, holds true. The imagery and typology of the Old Testament has bearing on the interpretation of the symbolism as used by St. John. Likewise the symbolism is subject to the teaching of the whole of Scripture,

1 Wemyss, op. cit., p. 6.

2 Ibid., p. 8.

and becomes erroneous if it by itself is permitted to become the rule of interpretation for the rest.

The Law of Proportion is a guide to valid interpretation, both as it applies to the distinction between the symbolic and non-symbolic, as well as within the symbolic field itself. The symbolism of the Book of Revelation, for instance, plays a more significant part in its interpretation, than the symbolism in Acts. Also, there are some symbols which play up the Scripture's meaning prominently, while others have little more significance than to add literary color.

The place of the symbol within the type of literary style is also a factor for consideration. While there is a definitely apocalyptic style, the present thought is that the use of the symbolic is often distinctly different in such illustrative forms as poetry and the narrative. The style of writing is a guide to be considered in discovering the use of the symbolic.¹

In the same trend of thought, the consideration of the symbol must be subject to the purpose and mind of the author. To use an illustration from the Old Testament, it is fantastic to use the familiar passage which speaks of warfare with chariots lit with torches as signifying a definite prediction of the automobile.²

1 Cf. Traina, Robert A.: Method in Bible Study and Teaching, (New York: Biblical Seminary Mimeographed Manual, 1951) pp.50-53.
2 Nahum 2:4.

In the Fourth Gospel, it is necessary to analyze the significance of the symbolism with respect to its contribution to the author's purpose, to produce faith in Jesus as the Christ and through faith, "life in His name."¹

D. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYMBOLISM IN RELIGIOUS TEACHING

Religious symbolism was nothing new to the people of Jesus' day, and hence not in the time of the composition of the Fourth Gospel. The historical development of its use in religion would itself comprise an extensive study. Both in the Old Testament Scriptures of the Jews, as well as in the pagan religions, symbolism has had a prominent part in the religious exercises and understanding of the people.² It is considered beyond the scope of this paper to delve deeply into this subject, except to the extent that it has direct bearing upon the Scriptural significance of the symbolism used by Jesus and John in the Fourth Gospel.

1. In the Jewish People's Training

The Jewish people had long been accustomed to the figurative and symbolic. Both in the Scriptural interpretations themselves, and also in the picturesque elements of worship, there was much of significance in religion which was conveyed through these means.

1 John 20:30-31

2 Cf. Wemyss, op. cit., pp. 5-6; 9-11.

Almost every element in the worship ritual had a symbolic meaning, from the kindling of the Sabbath lamps before sundown, through every action in the Sacrifice, the Synagogue service, and in the everyday Sabbath life at home.¹

To be specific, there was the intense symbolism of the Day of Atonement.² The sacrificial animals, the scapegoat, the High Priest's apparel, and the tremendous significance of his entering in through the veil to the Holy of Holies; all contributed to tell a story in object terms of a majestic truth of the spiritual life.

The ceremonies of the other feasts, mentioned as key points of time in the Gospel of John; the Passover, the Feast of Dedication, the Feast of Tabernacles, -- all had their peculiarly impressive character. The Jewish people were steeped in these traditions, and though there were tendencies to make more of these figures than of that to which they pointed, much blessing did result from their training in these things which were the "shadow of good things to come."³

In the interpretation of the Scriptures, too, the Jewish people were schooled in symbolism. To return to Wemyss:

-
- 1 Edersheim, Alfred: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1923) Vol. I, p. 437; Vol. II, pp. 56-58.
 - 2 Dean F. W. Farrar, in his "Early Days of Christianity," (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883) has a most interesting description of the rites of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, together with an account of the impressions left upon the people by these ceremonies. See Appendices XII and XIII, pp. 614-618.
 - 3 Hebrews 10:1

...The symbolical language of the prophets is almost a science in itself. None can fully comprehend the depth, sublimity, and force of their writings, who are not thoroughly acquainted with the peculiar and appropriate imagery they were accustomed to use.¹

Some of the symbolic actions employed by the Prophets are mentioned here to confirm this assertion: Samuel's robe accidentally torn by Saul, Isaiah walking barefoot for three years, Jeremiah's shattered earthenware vessel, Ezekiel's shaved head or the valley of dry bones, to mention a few.²

In the Rabbinical interpretations, too, there was much employment of allegory and the figurative, perhaps to an excessive extent. In a comparison of the Rabbinical School with the interpretive methods of Philo of Alexandria, Alfred Edersheim notes that:

These allegorical canons (of Philo) are essentially the same as those of Jewish traditionalism in the Haggadah, only the latter were not rationalizing, and far more brilliant in their application.³

It is an age old question as to how it could happen that the Jewish people, with all their training and preparation for the coming of the Messiah, should reject Him when He came. No doubt a part of the phenomenon may be explained by the psychological and historical development of the people, by their preoccupation with yearning for a restoration of an earthly kingdom. However, William Jones has developed an interesting idea which fits somewhat

1 Wemyss, op. cit., p. 2.

2 I Samuel 15; Isaiah 20; Jeremiah 19; Ezekiel 5, 37.

3 Edersheim, Alfred: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, (New York: Longman's, Green, and Co., 1923) p. 40.

into this discussion of symbolism, when he says that the Jews made the mistake of giving a literal interpretation to their law, drawing out the meanings of the symbolic as applying to the Law. Actually, however:

The letter of the Scripture is applied to the outward institutions and ceremonies of the law, as they stand in the words of the law without their interpretation: the spirit of them, or the intention of the lawgiver, is the same with the doctrine of the New Testament, called elsewhere the good things to come,¹ of which the law had an image and shadow.

2. In the Usage of Jesus

In his discourses, Jesus also made use of symbolism. However, a study of the Gospels reveals a great deal of difference in the symbols used by Jesus from those having to do especially with the ritualistic action. The reason for this is not that He disapproved of the ritual, for He took part in the Feasts at the Temple, and taught and worshipped in the Synagogue. Rather, the symbolism of the rituals in the Priest's exercise of worship was pointed at the future work of Redemption,² which was fulfilled in Christ's mission for mankind. Thus the sacrificial elements of His teaching were gathered up in His instructions concerning the Cross.³

On the other hand, Jesus' employment of symbolism was pointed toward the relationship between God and His people which should

1 Jones, op. cit., p. 27, cf. pp. 28-30.

2 Hebrews 7:11-28.

3 Mark 8:21-28; 10:35-45; 13:9-13; Luke 18:18-35; John 12:20-36.

prevail in a continuing fashion when the redemptive action was complete. Consequently the symbolic figures of the Saviour point to Himself as a continuing Redeemer: -- Shepherd, Physician, Light, Bread of Life, Living Water;¹ or to the character of the relationship in the Kingdom: -- consider the lilies; not a sparrow; vine and branches; marriage feast; the king; the sower; the mustard seed; the homecoming of a prodigal; the pearl of great price; the house founded on a rock; the laborers in the vineyard.² The visible is constantly used by Jesus to suggest the invisible, -- the hen gathering her chicks, the thief in the night, the lost and wandering sheep, the fields white unto harvest.³

Jesus, then, made use of the familiarity of the Jews with the language and meanings of symbolism, but turned its application to an illumination of His own person and His redemptive mission of suffering and death for the sins of mankind. The resultant reconciliation is the basis of the Divine invitation universally extended, "Come unto Me."

3. In the Usage of the Author of the Gospel

It is not the purpose of this study to make inquiry about the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, nor to leave it as a mystery.

-
- 1 John 10, Matthew 9, John 8, John 6, John 4, 7.
2 (a) Matthew 6; (b) Matthew 10; (c) John 15; (d) Matthew 22, 25;
(e) Matthew 22, Luke 14; (f) Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8;
(g) Matthew 13; (h) Luke 15; (i) Matthew 13; (j) Matthew 7;
(k) Matthew 21.
3 Luke 13; Matthew 24; Luke 15; Matthew 10. For this paragraph, cf. Fleming, Daniel.: op. cit., pp. 10-12.

The study is based upon the assumption that the findings of conservative scholarship which attribute this Gospel to the apostle John, are adequate evidence of its validity.¹ At the same time, the determining of authorship is not considered, as a problem, relevant to this inquiry into the Gospel's symbolism.

In his use of symbolism, John employs the symbolic as an aid to his purpose, to which reference has been briefly made.² John uses the actions of Jesus as confirmation of His character, but it is the Person of Christ who is emphasized, with the object of bringing men to believe that He is the Christ, and to have life in Him. Dr. Johannes Ylvisaker, American Lutheran Biblical scholar, in a harmony of the Gospels, calls attention to this emphasis in St. John:

The synoptic Gospels dwell principally upon the wonderful works of Jesus, and portray His Messianic might. His Kingdom, the character of this Kingdom, its development in the world, and its consummation are depicted. John directs our attention to the person of Jesus, His relation to the Father, and to the question of His personal importance as the light and life of the world...The sermons which John has recorded refer to the person of Jesus and are His personal testimony concerning Himself...(They) are apologetic in character, polemic discussions... to convince a class well versed in the Scriptures that Jesus whom they reject nevertheless is their only Lord and Saviour.³

-
- 1 Westcott, B. F.: The Gospel According to St. John, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950 edition), treats the authorship extensively in the Introduction, pp. v-xxxii. See also Lenski, R. C. H.: Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942) pp. 5-21; as well as the more extended treatment of the Authenticity of the Gospel, and objections to it, in Gloag, Paton J.: Introduction to the Johannean Writings, (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1891) pp. 95-148.
 - 2 Ante, p. 6
 - 3 Ylvisaker, Johs.: The Gospels (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932) pp. 26-27.

In developing the character of Jesus, John followed the same method in his use of symbolism which was his principle for choosing the events recorded. "Many other signs," he says in 20:31, "Jesus did in the presence of the disciples...But these are written that you might believe..." John's Gospel is then a selection of accounts, events, actions, and discourses in Jesus' life which took place in the presence of his disciples. John uses the disciples as eye-witnesses to bring testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ, with the purpose of creating faith in Him and with the end objective that the reader -- believer, through faith in Christ, shall have life in His name.

The use of symbolism contributes to this purpose. John is the only one of the Gospel accounts which contains the incident of John the Baptist pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God. It alone tells of the healing of the blind man at Siloam; the raising of Lazarus; the conversations with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman; or the reference of Jesus to Himself as the Good Shepherd, and the Light of Life of the world. John alone has accounts of the sermon at Capernaum on the bread of life, the last farewell to the disciples or the intercessory prayer. While not all these items have symbolic reference, at least for this study, it is noted that several of the symbols, also, are mentioned by St. John alone and used by him to describe the divine character of Jesus in human terms; to help the reader make the transition from the material world to the world of belief.

E. SUMMARY

It has been pointed out that the Scripture abounds in the use of symbolism, for the purpose of suggesting the character of the spiritual life and truth by representations of objects or ideas in the material world.

The symbolic is used in Scripture as a more or less natural vehicle because the use of familiar objects helps convey the concept of the spiritual idea; because the enlightenment of the mind by this means depends upon spiritual rather than intellectual growth; because the symbolic can and has become a code in times of peril; because outward signs give a trustworthy guarantee of that which they signify; and because the study of these things sharpens the appetite for intensive meditation. At the same time, interpretation of the figurative is not to be open to the vagaries of a wildly free imagination, but is to be subjected to definite regulations, and kept within the framework of the major laws of interpretation, such as: Scripture interprets Scripture; proportion; literary style; the author's purpose.

In tracing the historical development of symbolism as a factor in the Jewish setting of Jesus' day, it is found that the Jewish people were highly familiar with its use through the Old Testament Scriptures, and their ritual and sacrifices. Jesus employed many symbols in His teachings both of His own identity as the Divine Saviour, and also of the relationships which must

prevail in the spiritual life between the Father, the Redeemer, the Spirit, and the people. Finally, John applies the symbolic to the effective development of his purpose, to create faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

With this rather general approach to Biblical symbolism, the study proceeds to a more detailed study of the individual symbols which are recorded in the Fourth Gospel.

CHAPTER TWO

A STUDY OF SYMBOLS ILLUSTRATING
THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF JESUS

CHAPTER II

A STUDY OF SYMBOLS ILLUSTRATING THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF JESUS

A. INTRODUCTION

In general, published works in the study of this subject have emphasized symbolism in Christian art and ecclesiastical forms; or have followed its use in Semitic, Egyptian, Greek, and other mythological religious ideas. Detailed works in Biblical Symbolism have been few, with scarcely any interest in the subject in recent times.

The reasons for this may be at least twofold. In the first place, its expression may best be portrayed in terms of painting, stained glass, or other form of art, although this might also be considered a debatable question. Secondly, most of the Biblical symbolism, except for the apocalyptic literature, is incidental to the style, purpose, and interpretation of the Biblical accounts, and hence has been sometimes considered worthy of only incidental treatment in the framework of other emphases.

In the Fourth Gospel, it may be stated that here also the progression of thought is definitely not carried by the symbolism nor dependent upon it. This factor is rather incidental to the development of the Gospel, and in some instances almost hidden

in the directness of the unfolding purpose to create faith in Christ and life in His name.

On the other hand, with the understanding that no previously hidden key to the Gospel is here being offered, a study of the symbols holds validity in the first place because it is an interesting subject; secondly because it adds much to the Gospel in the way of color and detail; and thirdly because it helps throw light upon the development of the Gospel's theme and content.¹

B. SELECTION OF SYMBOLS

In selecting and classifying the individual symbols of the Fourth Gospel for more detailed study, there has not been a complete attempt to ferret out every item of such significance in the Gospel, but the more apparent ones have been somewhat arbitrarily selected. From the avowed purpose of John in writing "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," they have been classified as those illustrative of the personal character of Jesus, and those having a bearing upon His redemptive Mission. From the further purpose of John, "that believing, ye may have life in His name," comes the final classification: those illustrating the fellowship of the Saviour with the Redeemed.

1 Cf. Peyton, William W.: *The Memorabilia of Jesus*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892) pp. 37-39, for his discussion of the significance of the symbolism in St. John.

In the first group inquiry is made as to the significance of the grain of wheat, which must fall into the ground and die; and of the towel with which Jesus girded Himself and wiped the disciples' feet, as symbolic objects illustrating the character of Jesus.

Figures having bearing upon Christ's redemptive Mission include the word, the lamb, the brazen serpent, the water, the bread, the light, the door, and the cross. With respect to the living fellowship between the Saviour and the redeemed there occur the marriage feast, the shepherd, the vine, and the king.

At first glance it is noted that by far the greater number are included in the second group, and that the first group containing but two figures, scarcely has possibilities of any definitive treatment. These are listed separately, however, because they emphasize exemplary attitudes of character which the Christian believer is called to imitate, after the pattern of Christ. On the other hand, all which have bearing upon the redemptive mission emphasize the Lord as Divine Redeemer, carrying out an exclusive mission capable of no imitation by any human disciple.

These distinctions, together with the validity of each object as a symbol, will be discussed further in the individual developments. The first class of figures will now be studied: illustrating the personal character of Jesus.

C. STUDY OF THE SYMBOLS

1. The Grain of Wheat: Symbol of the Attitude of Sacrificial Giving

And Jesus answereth them, saying, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit."¹

The occasion for this statement of Jesus is the inquiry of the Greeks at the last Passover in Jerusalem at the close of His public ministry. "We would see Jesus," they say to Philip, who consults with Andrew, and the two bring the message to Jesus, without sensing the significance which He would attach to this request.

In view of the repeated statement that "the hour" or "My hour" has not yet come,² Jesus' response to the Greeks' request is a dramatic announcement. "The hour has come." It is the appropriate time for His death, but Jesus calls it the hour for the Son of man to be glorified. The connecting reference between the seemingly opposite poles of death and being glorified is to be found in Jesus' use of the symbol of the grain of wheat.

One of the basic rules of life is that fruitage requires sacrifice and the expenditure of life. We become impervious to this reality in the human sphere in our day to day living because of the extended period of the human generation. In the sphere of nature, there is no better understood example of this truth than the

1 John 12:23-24

2 John 2:4; 7:6,30; 8:20

grain of wheat, "A symbol which is clear to Jew and Gentile alike."¹

There are three alternatives in the choices which men make with regard to wheat. It may be consumed, stored, or planted. If it is consumed, that is the end of it -- there will never be any more fruit from those particular kernels. It is consumed because the primary value attached to it is its present value. If it is stored, it is out of circulation, at best; and inevitably the result is decay and loss.² We are reminded of the rich farmer in Jesus' parable whose only program for the use of his produce was more room for storage.³ Whether consumed through use or attempted storage, the result is the same for any grain of wheat: "it abides by itself alone." Only if the wheat is planted does it bring forth fruitage, -- and then the result is much increase. The long-run value outweighs that of the present.⁴

So it is with Jesus. He is like the grain of wheat which by dying produces much fruit. The comparison is plain in Lenski:

With divine mastery Jesus pictures the glorification which is about to begin for Him. The image chosen perfectly illustrates both the necessity of the cross and its resultant glory...

-
- 1 Lenski, R. C. H., op. cit., p. 862.
 - 2 Newspapers every so often carry accounts of difficulties of the Commodity Credits Corporation in connection with spoilage of products purchased by the government for storage and "Temporary" removal from market supplies. Latest item was about red kidney beans moulding in a New York state warehouse after three years of storage.
 - 3 Luke 12:15-21
 - 4 Cf. Dods, Marcus: The Gospel of St. John, (The Expositor's Bible, Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll) (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1900) Vol. II, p. 34.

(Like a grain of wheat), so will the Son of man remain alone if He does not stoop to death upon the cross...But God's incarnate Son, by dying, will produce millions of children of God, fruit in glorious abundance. "The death of Christ was the death of the most fertile grain of wheat." (Augustine).¹

A comparison of the good done by the life of Christ with that done by His death, drawn carefully by Dods,² shows how only through His death could all men be gathered unto Him. He could have gone on in other lands when Palestine grew too dangerous, -- teaching, leading, inspiring men by His visible presence. Yet it was by the very greatness of His visible presence and its benefits that men were detained from penetrating to the spirit and mind of Christ.

To use His own figure, He was as a seed unsown so long as He lived, valuable only in His own proper person; but by dying His life obtained the value of seed sown, propagating its kind in everlasting increase.³

J. F. Bernard calls attention to the grain of wheat as an illustration of:

The paradox that Life comes through Death, viz, that the grain of wheat must die before it can bear fruit. It has, perhaps, a special applicability here, in reference to what precedes, for Christ, who is about to be glorified in death, claimed to be Himself the Bread of Life.⁴

A continued symbolism may be traced through the Scripture's allusions to Christ the Seed. "The seed of the woman" must be

1 Lenski, R. C. H. op. cit., pp. 862-863.

2 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 37-39.

3 Loc. cit.

4 Bernard, J. F.: The Gospel According to St. John, (International Critical Commentary) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) Vol. II, p. 433.

planted, -- must die, -- in order to "bruise the serpent's head."¹ As the wheat produces seed only through the death of planting, so Christ by dying "shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand."² Paul makes the transfer of the application to the Christian life in his vivid portrayal of death as the planting of a seed, but he changes the figure of the result, for the Christian resurrection is likened to the green plant which springs from the seed instead of to the ripened grain of harvest.

The grain of wheat has further meaning in its relationship to life itself. In Jesus' use of the symbol, the point of comparison is the necessity for the grain to die for the fruitage to come, rather than the process of life or the growth to harvest.³ The fruitage is the fuller life which comes through death, through willingness to be divested of all that is of self only. Jesus says: "He that loveth his life loseth it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."⁴ This is applicable both to Jesus and to his disciples, -- to any man. The willingness to sacrifice oneself and the grasping attitude of "whatever happens, my life and my interest come first," is the secret which releases the core of life to be productive in life, instead of protective for self.

1 Genesis 3:15

2 Isaiah 53:10

3 Lenski, R. C. H., loc. cit.

4 John 12:25

Emphasis on this meaning of the wheat is found in the treatment of this passage by Westcott, who says:

The general truth of verse 24 is presented in its final antithesis in relation to human life. Sacrifice, self-surrender, death, is the condition of the highest life: selfishness is the destruction of life...The original word (ψυχή), rendered "life" here and "soul" in verse 27 is comprehensive, and describes that which in each case expresses the fullness of man's being. He who seeks to gather round himself that which is perishable, so far perishes with it: he who divests himself of all that is of this world only, so far prepares himself for the higher life.¹

The death of Christ is that which enables the fullness of His life to be released, first in Himself as pertains to His accomplishment of His mission as the Son of God sent to give His life as a ransom for many, that He might take it again in complete exaltation. Further, His death is the release of His life in the world, so as to be produced in others, as John states in his purpose, "that believing, ye may have life in His name."² It is only through the salvation which is in Jesus as One in whom "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,"³ that His fullness of life is released in the disciple. Consequently it is in the release of this fullness of the life of Christ that "any man" has the power of fulfilling the conditions of the higher life. He is able to abandon selfishness as the real basis of living, and to take action upon the conditions of sacrifice, surrender, and

1 Westcott, B. F., op. cit., p. 181.

2 John 20:31

3 Colossians 1:19

death for the fulfillment of the highest, only as he is identified with Christ and the fullness of His life in him.

The value of the grain of wheat falling into the ground as a symbol is seen clearly when it is considered that the disciples failed to grasp its full significance at the moment. Only later, when they could ponder upon it in the afterlight of Christ's death and resurrection and the release of His life into Christian hearts, did it come to have a deep meaning. As a definitive teaching of the great truth of the higher life it did not sink in, but when it could be placed in its symbolic reference to the spiritual reality it helped them greatly to understand what Christ's life really meant.

2. The Towel: Symbol of the Attitude of Compassionate Action

And during the supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God and goeth unto God, riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments; and he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded...So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and sat down again, he said unto them, "Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Teacher, and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, a servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him." If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."¹

1 John 13:2-5, 12-17.

For their last observance of the Passover together, Jesus and his disciples came to the large upper room which had been prepared for them by Peter and John.¹ As they entered, the old dispute of the disciples flared up again: the question of who among them was the greatest.² Possibly the occasion for such discussion now was the place each should occupy at the Passover table. As they entered, they no doubt noticed the usual basin and towel for the purpose of cleansing and refreshing the feet, which would have become heated and dusty from walking in the fine, scorching dust of the streets. Usually, if no servant was present, one of the disciples would no doubt perform the service of foot washing, an important part of the courtesy offered to anyone before sitting or reclining for a meal.³ At this time, however, filled with pent up emotion and with the sense of their own dignity, none of the disciples would take up this menial task. Jesus waited in vain for someone to volunteer. When none did, he Himself arose from the table, laid aside his outer garments, girded himself with the towel or apron provided for the foot-washing, and thus appeared clothed like the customary slave to whom this duty would ordinarily be assigned. Picking up the basin, he began to wash the disciples' feet, wiping them with the apron which was bound around his waist.

1 Luke 22:7-13

2 Luke 22:24, Luke 9:46-48

3 Luke 7:44

Whatever the thoughts of the disciples, not one of them even now interfered by jumping up to offer himself for this task. Yet the scene is charged with emotion, as Jesus uses this pointed example to burn into their memory the lesson of the true dignity and greatness: that of humility which expresses itself in loving and willing service, and which permits love to have a free rein in controlling the emotions of the heart. They needed these lessons for their heated passions to be transformed, and for their mood to become such as would enable them to listen to what He has to say in that last evening.¹

The probable effect of Jesus' action is most vividly portrayed by one of the accounts of this section:

Jesus could very well have eaten with men who were unwashed; but He could not eat with men hating one another, glaring fiercely across the table, showing in every way malice and bitterness of spirit. Far more needful to their happiness at the feast than the comfort of cool and clean feet was their restored affection and esteem for one another, and that humility which takes the lowest place...Jesus knew that with one exception they were at the bottom good men, and that they loved Him and one another; and that this vicious temper was but the soil contracted for the hour. But nonetheless it must be washed off. And He did effectually wash it off by washing their feet. For was there a man among them who, when he saw His Lord and Master stooping at his couch foot, would not gladly have changed places with Him?...Is it not certain that... from a group of angry, proud, resentful men, they were in five minutes changed into a company of humbled, meek, loving disciples of the Lord, each hardly thinking of himself and esteeming others better?²

-
- 1 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., pp. 75-78. This a noteworthy description of the whole setting of the Supper. See also the development in Ylvisaker, Johs., op. cit., pp. 646-654.
 - 2 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 85.

Only Peter raises any objection to having Jesus wash his feet, and his complaint and responses enable Jesus the better to teach His lesson of humility. Peter, impulsive, first refuses to permit Jesus to wash his feet, although Jesus lets him know that He knows, as the Lord, what He is doing. Then he turns a complete "about face," and remonstrates: "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Still he is not willing to let Jesus call the turn, but must give the directions and orders, as to what is best. The deep need of the disciples for this shock in order to convey a permanent lesson on their need for humility is thus apparent.

Many have made much of the symbolism in this action of Jesus. The footwashing has been linked with the laver of the Old Testament Tabernacle;¹ it has been called the symbol of spiritual cleansing which is involved in the Atonement;² and it has been identified with baptism in various ways, even among some of the more liberal scholars.³

The application of the symbolism in these respects extends beyond any symbolic object in connection with this incident, and over into the action of the footwashing itself. The point

-
- 1 Habershon, Ada R.: *The Study of the Types*, (London: Morgan and Scott) pp. 83-84.
 - 2 Bernard, J. H., *op. cit.*, p. 463. Dr. Bernard, while discussing the issue of spiritual purification, disposes of it as foreign to the context. Dods, *loc. cit.*, develops the idea rather fully, but not with any direct reference to the atonement.
 - 3 Bernard, J. H., *loc. cit.*; also Lenski, R. C. H., *op. cit.*, pp. 917-923, representing the conservative position.

of reference here is the lesson of that sort of humility in which even the Lord and Master may perform the most servile action for the benefit of another. This lesson is centered in the willingness of Jesus to take up the towel and basin and stoop as a servant before the disciples. It is in this willingness that the true significance of the cleansing itself is found. Consequently, centering the symbolism on the action of Jesus as a lesson that we, too, shall aid each other in removing fault, sins and stains of guilt is to take a tangent from the central teaching of the incident.¹ In addition, anything of this kind is impossible for disciples and is the prerogative only of Jesus.

The central object in connection with the central lesson is the towel. It is when Jesus is girded with this that He appears most vividly in the attitude of the servant. The towel or apron then becomes a symbol both of Jesus in His humility and of the cleansing.² In turn, the towel as that which makes the difference between Jesus as Lord and Jesus as servant is the link between the cleansing and Jesus' teaching concerning it: "A servant is not greater than his lord, nor one sent than the one who sent him." In this connection, Lenski states:

Jesus has given the disciples an example, and he intends that they should not merely admire but should actually follow it. He knows what may prevent them from doing so: the feeling

1 Lenski, R. C. H., op. cit., p. 927.

2 Bernard, J. H., op. cit., p. 459 explains the practice and manner of the foot washing, and illustrates the condescension of Jesus from contemporary incidents.

that they are just as good as others or even superior to others...By His example, however, Jesus has placed us where we must drop all other comparisons and compare ourselves only with Him...If any disciple of Jesus should ever think himself too great to stoop to menial tasks in serving his fellow-disciples, he can do so only by thinking himself greater than Jesus, his Lord, for this Lord had just stooped that low.¹

Even the high office to which they are called as those who are sent does not lift them to a plane above the necessity for the attitude of readiness for menial service in love. Never can they be greater than Jesus, who sent them, for a far higher commission was His, but He had taken up the towel, and stooped to serve them.

It is conceded that the towel as a symbol does not stand on the solid ground of some of the rest. It does not have the general application of the grain of wheat, for instance, which, whenever planted, at least silently implies the lesson that death is involved in fruitage. Not every use of the towel calls up the attitude of Christ in His humility. On the other hand, it does represent, in Jesus' life, as well as in Christian discipleship, that willingness to appear as less than great in order to be great in service and great in the joy and honor of the Lord's commendation for faithfulness to the needs of others, in body and spirit.

1 Lenski, R. C. H., op. cit., pp. 928-929.

D. SUMMARY

The symbols which represent the character of Jesus are the grain of wheat and the towel. They are illustrative of attitudes: a willingness to correspond to verities of life, at the cost of sacrifice of life on the one hand, and sacrifice of the marks of position on the other.

The symbol of the wheat represents the life of Christ in the respect of its release through death to be produced anew in the lives of men who believe in Him. It further illustrates the spiritual reality that sacrifice, suffering, and death are the essential means whereby any one may attain to the higher life.

The symbol of the towel represents the life of Christ with respect to His humility and service as representative of His attitude of compassionate action. It shows forth the life principle of attainment through compassionate service even at the voluntary cost of representation in position as being lower in dignity than a factual appraisal would permit.

From the highly limited number of symbols which illustrate the character of Jesus; as well as from the limitations of their teachings, it is apparent that the Gospel does not depend upon symbolism for the portrayal of Jesus as a personality. On the other hand it has been noted that much of the real meaning of Christ's life, especially with respect to the mystery of its spiritual release into the lives of men, is to be comprehended through the study of these figures representing the realities of the higher life.

CHAPTER THREE

SYMBOLS HAVING A BEARING
UPON THE REDEEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS

CHAPTER III

SYMBOLS HAVING A BEARING UPON THE REDEMPTIVE MISSION OF JESUS

A. INTRODUCTION

In the Fourth Gospel, a study of the redemptive mission of Jesus with reference to symbolism reveals a considerable number of figures which have bearing upon the atonement of Christ. Any special significance which may be attached to this fact will be noted, as well as the more varied lessons to be learned from the representation of the various figures upon the redemptive mission of Jesus. By no means will all of them be taken up in detail, because to make such a study would be beyond the scope of this work.

Symbols which will be discussed in this chapter include the lamb, the bread, the light, and the cross. Other figures which could be placed in this category would be the brazen serpent, the water, the door, and the word, though the validity of the last may be questioned.

While the selection of the symbols named for individual treatment has been made to some extent by arbitrary choice, there are some relationships between the figures which also have bearing upon the classifications made. The significance of the

brazen serpent is at least partly covered by the meaning of the cross; that of the water by the bread; that of the door by the light in this chapter, and the shepherd in the following section.

B. STUDY OF THE SYMBOLS

1. The Lamb: Symbol of Sin-Bearing

On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world... Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and saith, "Behold, the Lamb of God." And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.¹

Out of this testimony of John the Baptist concerning Jesus as the Lamb of God has come one of the oldest and most universal symbols of the Christian Church. In this figure the Lamb of God is identified with the Old Testament lamb of the Passover;² with the lamb of the sacrifices;³ and with the "lamb that is led to the slaughter" and the "sheep which before its shearers is dumb."⁴

The lamb is first of all the symbol of gentleness, harmlessness, and innocence. Silent in its suffering, meek, trusting, the lamb represents quietness and lack of struggle even at its slaughter. By the very nature of John's testimony, however, the lamb must here be more than the symbol of gentleness

1 John 1:29, 35-37

2 Exodus 12, 13

3 Exodus 29:38 ff.

4 Isaiah 53:7

and innocence.¹ Indeed, it is sometimes even said that the testimony does not have any reference at all to Isaiah 53, but that the picture is of the Paschal Lamb and the lamb of the sacrifices. On the other hand, the silently suffering lamb of Isaiah represents sacrifice as well as innocence,² --for "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The only way in which the lamb could take away sin would be through sacrifice. The lamb was the victim offered at the morning and evening sacrifices, and thus was a well known offering to God. Even before the prescribed laws of God to the people of the Exodus, the lamb had been the object of sacrifice.³ Always the idea conveyed is that the sacrifice is the act of bearing another's sin. Man, unable to rid himself of sin or its consequences, needs a substitute if his life is to be spared. This substitute, in the Old Testament, was the lamb of sacrifice. In the New Testament, it is Christ, of whom the former lamb is a type.

Even more typical of Christ is the figure of the Paschal Lamb. Westcott says of this:

As the passover was not far off,⁴ it is impossible to exclude the thought of the Paschal Lamb, with which the Lord was afterward identified.⁵ The deliverance from Egypt was the

1 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 46.

2 Bernard, J. H., op. cit., Vol. I, p. 43.

3 Genesis 22:13

4 John 2:12-13

5 John 19:36. Cf. also I Peter 1:19

most conspicuous example of the Messianic deliverance,¹ and the "lamb" called up all its memories and promises...The title as applied to Christ, under the circumstances of its utterance, conveys the ideas of vicarious suffering, of patient submission, of sacrifice, of redemption, not separately or clearly defined, but significant and according to the spiritual preparation and character of those before whom the words were spoken.²

Lenski, on the other hand, dismisses all attempts to identify the Lamb of God with any particular lamb of the Old Testament by contending that it includes all of them, "since each could typify only some part of the stupendous work God's own Lamb would perform."³

The lamb which takes away sins is God's lamb. It belongs to Him, and does not merely come from Him. In this title, too, lies the idea of being without blemish, a requirement in the offered lamb symbolic of Christ's sinlessness as a substitutionary expiation for man's sin.⁴

God's Lamb takes away sin -- the sin of the world. The figure is one of removal -- not merely of bearing or taking them upon himself, although as Westcott states, it is by "taking upon Himself our infirmities that Christ took them away."⁵ This is also the idea presented by Isaiah. Sin is borne by the Lamb, it is taken away.⁶ The result, as shown by the use of the lamb in the offerings, is acceptance and forgiveness.⁷ "When Christ

1 Ezekiel 20:33 ff., Hebrews 3:3 ff., Revelation 15:3

2 Westcott, B. F., op. cit., p. 20.

3 Lenski, R. C. H., op. cit., p. 127.

4 Loc. cit. Also Westcott, loc. cit.

5 Loc. Cit. See Matthew 8:17.

6 Isaiah 53:11, 43:25.

7 Habershon, Ada, R., op. cit., pp. 37-38; Leviticus 1:3-17; 5:1-13

is considered to have taken away my sin by His sacrifice of Himself, then I am accepted by God because I am forgiven."

The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. His action is a complete action -- the collective sin of all created humanity is borne away by Him. Westcott notes that John dwells predominantly upon the aspect in the atonement, of removal of sin rather than upon removal of sin's punishment, with notable exceptions.¹ The death of Christ is a sacrifice of a substitute which is applicable for all sin.

On the other hand, the figure of the Paschal Lamb has in it the element of appropriation. The lamb must not only be killed, -- its blood must be sprinkled on the doorposts. So Christ must be sacrificed for the sin of the world, but His sacrifice must also be personally appropriated for personal forgiveness.²

"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." The number of those who have turned to look on Him and found in Him their acceptance before God because their sin is taken away will never be fully known. For the Son of God came down from heaven to be made the Lamb of God. On calvary our Paschal Lamb was sacrificed, -- yet not for the continuance of frustration, but for total victory. Not repeatedly, but "once for all," He made sacrifice for the sins of the people, "when He offered up Himself."³ When the sheep of God have strayed,

1 Westcott, loc. cit., John 3:36, I John 2:2.

2 Habershon, Ada, R., loc. cit.

3 Hebrews 7:27.

then One comes who is the true Lamb, to be "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities."¹

The Bible's final symbolism of the Lamb of God presents Him victorious, seated upon the throne of heaven, having become the shepherd, to guide His people "unto fountains of the waters of life."² His lambs and sheep are those who are fed by His word and sacraments; who listen to His voice in faith; who in this life are "counted as sheep for the slaughter,"³ but who, in the final sounding of the trumpet, shall "skip over the hills of eternity, singing the new song of the Lamb."⁴

2. The Bread: Symbol of Balanced Nourishment

They said therefore unto him, "What then doest thou for a sign, that we may see, and believe thee? What workest thou? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'"

Jesus therefore said unto them, "Verily, verily, it was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world."

They said therefore unto him, "Lord, evermore give us this bread."

Jesus said unto them, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst..."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth hath eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

1 Isaiah 53:5

2 Revelation 7:16

3 Romans 8:36

4 Winzen, Damascus: Symbols of Christ, New Testament, (Bethlehem, Conn.: Regina Landis, 1948)

I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

The Jews therefore strove with one another, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus therefore said unto them, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died; he that eateth this bread shall live forever."¹

As in the case of many of the figures used by St. John so also here the validity of the symbolism is seen in two respects: first, the fact is noted that the meaning of Jesus was not made immediately clear to the disciples, and more particularly to the multitude who heard. Second, the discourse in which the symbol of the bread is found has a depth of significance which, though never completely unfolded, led the disciples into vivid perception and understanding of the spiritual implications of the life of Christ and of the Christian life.

The discourse about the Bread of Life was a hard saying for some of the disciples, and at its close "many...went back, and walked no more with him."² The difficulties attached at that time to a full perception were many indeed, and it would be only through the kind of mood expressed by Peter that anyone could persevere

1 John 6:30-35; 41-58

2 v. 66

to know what should hereafter come to pass: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."¹

Several factors involved in the symbolism of the bread are to be noted in a study of the setting in which it is found. Some of them are:

1. Only the day before, Jesus had performed the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, with five barley loaves and a few fishes, when twelve baskets of fragments were gathered up after all had eaten their fill.² Jesus says some of the people were seeking him only because of the loaves,³ and that they should rather work for the food which does not perish, to be received from the Son of man, who has been sealed by the Father.⁴ To their question as to what to do to be doing the works of God, He answered, "That you believe on him whom He hath sent."⁵
2. The claim of being sent of God caused the Jews to ask him then for a sign of proof "from heaven that they may believe thee."⁶ They reduced "believing on Christ" to "believing Christ," although one is true faith, the other simple belief in the truth of a message. Several of our authorities: Westcott,⁷ Dods,⁸ Bernard,⁹ mention the common belief among

1 v. 68

2 John 6:1-15

3 v. 26

4 v. 27

5 v. 29

6 v. 30

7 Westcott, op. cit., p. 101

8 Dods, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 215

9 Bernard, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 194

the Jews that the Messiah would outdo Moses in wonders when He came. "Accordingly the questioners of Jesus are here represented as telling him that something more wonderful than the miracle of the loaves was expected of the Messiah."¹ In view of this expectation it is not surprising that the best attempts of Jesus to explain the true "Bread of Life," would be hard medicine to take for many. As Westcott states, "He Himself was the sign which the Jews could not read. No other more convincing could be given."²

3. A third factor involved in the symbolism is that which Jesus introduces in verse 51 and develops in 53-58: that of the bread that He will give: His flesh for the life of the world. Up to this point He has spoken of Himself as the Bread of Life, given by the Father, which gives life to the world. Here he speaks of the Bread which He Himself will give for the life of the world; His flesh. To feed on Him it is essential to eat His flesh and to drink His blood. Of this Bernard says:

Difficult as the Jews had found the thought that Jesus was Himself the heavenly bread, divinely given, for which they had asked, they find much greater difficulty in this new and strange suggestion that Jesus was to give them His flesh to eat...(Further), Such an expression as "to drink blood" would be especially startling to a Jew, for whom the blood of animals was tabu, and was expressly forbidden to be used as food.³

1 Loc. cit.

2 Westcott, loc. cit.

3 Bernard, op. cit., p. 208.

Understanding of these special factors helps men to be aware of the necessity for symbolic teaching to be suggestive or representative in nature, so that a later enlightenment will be the result, when the symbol may be more closely associated with the spiritual reality it is intended to illustrate. To people in the mood of the Jews, with their identification of national with religious longings, no argument or discussion could immediately bridge the gap for them between their expectations and the intent of Jesus' spiritual message of Himself as the Bread of Life. One of the purposes of the symbolism was to suggest a relationship between their own perception and the spiritual concept of Jesus which would be provocative and striking enough to make them continue to think and remember His teaching until it could sink home. Otherwise it would be likely that they would thrust it from their minds as a foreign intrusion. At the same time, it is to be noted that there are values wholly valid for the scene and occasion of the actual circumstances, which would be lost if it were assumed that this teaching were wholly symbolic.

On the following page is a chart of the action in John 6 which is intended to be of assistance in clearly picturing the scene. The various elements in the simplified diagram should be self-explanatory.

Basically, the symbolism of the bread is that of nourishment, or rather, of the source of that food which is the true nourishment for the life of man. Christ has full control of the resources of nature, and is able to feed the world. Whether bread comes direct from heaven, as the manna did; by miraculous supply, as in the feeding of the 5000; or by the normal processes of man's labor and nature's riches, the source is the same. The control is in God's hand, and the display of this control by Jesus in any way is sign enough of His divine power.

But the supply of that bread which is for the nourishment of physical life is not the goal of life, and Jesus is to be sought because His ability to provide this bread is a sign of His Divinity, and therefore a sign of His value for something much greater than as a bread provider. Yet the figure of bread conveys the essence of that which Jesus provides for human life as the Messiah, for He Himself comes as the true manna from heaven to give life unto the world. He is Himself the Bread of Life, without which no life however strong can continue to exist.

People not only need food to be provided; they need to eat as well. Jesus emphasizes that no one can have life in himself unless he eats the flesh of the Son of man and drinks His blood.¹ He is the source of life and health only as men eat Him. The parallel of flesh and blood implies their division in death, hence the reference is to the crucified and glorified Saviour, --

¹ John 6:53.

the divine-human Son of God and Son of man.¹ To eat His flesh is to appropriate Him to oneself; to be identified with Him in faith. To drink His blood is to accept in the soul the efficacy of the sacrifice of the blood of the Son of man as it was given upon the cross; and of the atonement which becomes a reality by that action.² Luther lays his finger on the little word, "My:"

With great mighty letters we ought to engrave what Christ says: MY, MY flesh. With this word, MY, He distinguishes and separates Himself from all other flesh whatever it may be called. For here, My flesh is as much as "I am God's son, my flesh is filled with divinity and is a divine flesh." His flesh alone will do it. To this God would have us attached and bound fast. Apart from the person who is born of Mary and truly has flesh and blood, and has been crucified, we are not to seek nor find God. For we are to grasp and find God alone by faith in the flesh and blood of Christ and are to know that this flesh and blood is not fleshy and bloody, but both are full of divinity.³

Without the Son men have no life; for in men themselves there is no spring of life. But Christ's gift of His flesh and blood to anyone becomes in the recipient a spring of life within. The believer must be made partaker in both, not only as a conclusive, decisive action, but as a continuing process.⁴ "He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life."⁵ The nature of this relationship as a continuous, pleasurable, satisfying, nourishing, growing process is said in varying ways:

1 Cf. Westcott, op. cit., p. 107.

2 Lenski, op. cit., p. 492.

3 Quoted by Lenski, p. 489.

4 Cf. Westcott, loc. cit.

5 John 6:54.

"I will raise him at the last day."¹ The resurrection was a well known article of Jewish belief.² What Jesus teaches is that the life which is by faith in Him, by partaking of His flesh and blood, alone will guarantee our being raised up in glory.

"My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."³ In fact, "my flesh" and "my blood" are the only food and drink worthy of being called true or real.⁴

"He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."⁵ This is a continuing, lasting, living relationship based upon continuing appetite, eating, and nourishment.

"As the living Father hath sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me."⁶ Christ speaks of the vital fellowship with the Father of the Incarnate Son of God, the Son of man. As the Father is the spring and source of life for the Son, so Christ becomes for anyone who "eats Him," the source of continual communion and nourishment for the assimilation of His life, and thus brings the believer into a life of dependence upon Him.⁷

"This is the bread that came down out of heaven: not as the fathers ate, and died; he that eateth this bread shall live

1 John 6:54.

2 John 11:24

3 John 6:55.

4 Marginal reading, ASV.

5 John 6:56.

6 John 6:57.

7 Cf. Bernard, Vol. I, p. 213

forever."¹ The concluding statement of the discourse once more contrasts the transitory effect of the earthly manna with the permanent effect of the Bread that actually came down from heaven. The blessed result of eating this bread is that it makes him who eats live forever. There is an invitation here: Let anyone who wants that life eat of the Bread of Life.²

The question of this teaching of Jesus as symbolic of the Holy Communion has been a problem in the Church. The language of Jesus, especially in the repeated phrasing of "eating the bread," and "eating the flesh of the Son of man," is such that it cannot refer primarily to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or be merely prophetic of it. The teaching, as Westcott states, "treats essentially of spiritual realities with which no external act, as such, can be co-extensive."³ Lenski views the spiritual eating by faith as equally applicable to receiving the Lord in baptism, through the Word, or in the Supper: always an inward spiritual act which means continued communion with Christ and therefore is always connected with salvation. "To eat and drink the elements of the supper orally," on the other hand, "is an outward act which is sometimes not salutary but is unto judgment. I Corinthians 11:28-29."⁴

1 John 6:58.

2 Cf. Lenski, op. cit., p. 501.

3 Westcott, op. cit., p. 113.

4 Lenski, op. cit., p. 504.

The teaching of Jesus here, however, does throw light also upon the significance and central meaning of the Supper. The conclusion of Westcott on this subject is worthy of note:

St. John living in the centre of Christian society does not notice the institution of services which were parts of the settled experience of Church life. He presupposes them; and at the same time records the discourses in which the ideas clothed for us and brought near to us in the two Sacraments were set forth. He guards the Sacraments in this way from being regarded either as ends in themselves or as mere symbols. He enables us to see how they correspond with fundamental views of the relations of man to God; how they are included in one sense in the first teaching of the Gospel; how Christianity is essentially sacramental as Judaism is essentially typical; how, through the Incarnation, the relations between things outward and inward, things seen and unseen, are revealed to us as real and eternal, and not superficial and transitory.¹

The symbol of the Bread, then is that it represents Jesus Himself, who is to be eaten, and thus to nourish and strengthen every fiber of life. A couple of sentences from Augustine are fitting as a summary:

This food and drink Christ wishes to be understood as fellowship with His Body and members. This is therefore to eat that food and to drink that blood, to abide in Christ and to have Him abiding in oneself.²

3. The Light: Symbol of Complete Illumination

And again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

The Pharisees therefore said unto him, "Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true."

Jesus answered and said unto them, "Even if I bear witness of myself, my witness is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. Yea

1 Westcott, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

2 Quoted by Westcott, loc. cit.

and if I judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me. Yea and in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true. I am he that beareth witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."

They said therefore unto him, "Where is thy Father?"

Jesus answered, "Ye know neither me, nor my Father: if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also."¹

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not.²

Jesus therefore said unto them, "Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light"... "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me may not abide in darkness."³

The light as a symbol has its foundation in the passage in John 8, where Jesus speaks at the Feast of Tabernacles. Two great symbols of the feast are used to portray His nature and mission by their familiar figures..

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in commemoration of the time when the Israelites dwelt in tents during their wandering in the wilderness, and more so, of their deliverance from the desert by entering the Promised Land. Hence it was a joyful festival which also observed a thanksgiving for the harvest.

For the extended observance of this feast, the people were to live for seven days in tents, or booths, constructed entirely of boughs. There were several commemorative actions involved

1 John 8:12-19

2 John 1:4-5

3 John 12:35-36, 46

in the feast, such as marching around the altar each day, and seven times on the last day, to observe the falling of the walls of Jericho. Another rite was the division of the people into three groups, one of which went to gather branches in the fields with which to adorn the altar; another grouped itself behind a priest who with a golden cup went to bring water from the Pool of Siloam, while the third group remained in the Temple. Upon the return of the group with the water, it was poured out into a funnel in the altar -- the water representing the spring of water from the rock with which Israel's thirst was quenched in the desert.¹

It is at this dramatic moment, in the lull following the pouring out of the water that Jesus cries out, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."² Thus Jesus turns the symbolism of the water in the feast from a commemoration of the past to a figure of Himself, the living water.

Finally, there was the rite of the lighting of the Temple, for illumination at night. As the priests lit the candelabra in the inner court, the people staged a torch dance in the light, even old men entering into the dancing. This ceremony was for

1 Smith, Wm.: Dictionary of the Bible, (New York, Fleming H. Revell Company) pp. 679-680. See also the descriptions of the feast in Edersheim, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 148-151, 156-160, 164-167; and in Dods, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 273-275.

2 John 7:37.

the remembrance of the leadership of Jehovah by the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud during the wanderings of the Israelites.

Although there is argument as to whether this observance took place every night or only the first night of the feast, this is irrelevant because the setting in chapter eight is not that of the Temple crowded with people as in chapter seven. Many people are present, but they were chiefly the Pharisees, -- regular daily visitors there. The setting is that the feast has ended; the pilgrims wending homeward; but the excitement and uplift of the holy days remain.¹ Nevertheless, the symbolism of the feast is still vivid and new to all, and there is no question as to the application of Jesus.

As always, however, He makes application to Himself of the original figure -- not merely that of the ceremony. As the light of the world, He likens Himself not to the candles lighting the Temple, but to that for which they stood -- the light of the Israelites in their wanderings, as Jehovah Himself led them by means of the pillar of fire.

Further, the symbol, as usual, is not able to carry the entire significance of Jesus' meaning.

Jesus is not merely Israel's light, temporary and partial; He is the world's light. "I am the light of the world," living, complete, eternal, all inclusive. Identified with the pillar of fire, the figure of Christ the Light also speaks of His nature as Divine.

¹ Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 592-593; Westcott, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

Respects in which Jesus as the Light of the world may be compared to the pillar of fire are as follows:

1. The purpose of His light is for guidance, direction and illumination. The pillar of fire in the wilderness led the people in their movements and also indicated when they should remain in encampment. Dods makes the point that their movement rather than their conduct was guided by the light.¹ However, the guidance given as to movement certainly was based upon their own response to God in conduct. Had the light of Jehovah meant all it should have meant to the Israelites in terms of personal guidance and inner trust, the path of movement over which Jehovah led them would have been a different one from that traced by the forty years of wandering.

The guidance of Christ is for the inner life as well as for outward movements of man. However, He does not guide in so spectacularly visible a manner as the pillar of fire which led the Israelites. He is a light within, and this is the real perfection which makes Him the Light of the world. It may be said that men may be led to a certain extent by a light of Christ which may be followed even without real sympathy for Divine ways and without assent to the motives which the Lord means to implant when the light is given. In this respect, all the Israelites followed the pillar of fire, and

1 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., pp. 275-276.

in this manner men today say they live by the teachings of Christ, without finding the true illumination.

On the other hand, only when Christ shines from within is the entire scope of life's daily rounds penetrated by the Divine illumination. When this happens the common darkness that usually surrounds the intimate concerns of human character, human conduct, and human destiny is dissipated; the clouds and gloom that have overhung the monotonous routines of life are gone. The horizon is widened, the prospect cleared, and all things which enter into the present are seen in their true dimensions.¹ The possession of this kind of light depends altogether on living personally and actually in Christ and by His direction. The guidance involved here is then an inner illumination from the inward presence in a man's life of Jesus, the Light of the world; and this is different from joining the host of Israel in breaking camp and going along when Jehovah indicated a move by the leading of the pillar of fire.

2. He is an ongoing light. He is not stationary, but moving, and His guidance is also in the moving stream of life. As the view of the road ahead in travelling is limited by the topography of the earth and by finite optical capacity, so the vision of life's journey is limited by its circumstances and by finite human capacities for spiritual vision.

¹ Dods, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-281.

"Wherever we are in life, there the Light is available for us to follow."

3. In the "following," the idea of pilgrimage is prominent. The light is for the purpose of guiding humanity to a destination, -- out of the darkness into the realm where "there shall be night no more."¹ Where the light leads, men must follow, for not to follow means to turn aside and be lost in the desert with no further chance of contact with the Light. This is not meant to ignore the great compassion of Christ as a seeking Shepherd for the lost lamb,² but to point out that men sometimes love darkness more than light and deliberately choose to live without the light of Christ.³

For the follower, the guidance of Christ the Light means action, movement, progress. The light is not for self-absorbed, idle contemplation.⁴ As the Israelites actually followed the pillar of fire to finally pass over Jordan into the Promised Land, so followers of Christ are moved to action and progress along life's way, with the certain assurance that His illumination and guidance will be continuous into the eternal day.

As has been indicated above, one of the basic ideas with respect to light is that it is an active power which overcomes

1 Revelation 22:5
2 Luke 15:3-7
3 John 3:19
4 Westcott, loc. cit.

an opposing power called "darkness".¹ The force of this is that there is largely a moral root to the darkness in which men are involved. Christ does not shed direct light upon the kind of darkness which may be called the ignorance of worldly knowledge, such as scientific questions. At the same time, there is no realm of knowledge upon which Christ does not give illumination indirectly. However, this is not the kind of darkness which causes men to sink or to ruin their lives upon the rocks of distressing difficulties. Men are blinded by the darkness of their own passions and sins, until they not only have lost their way, but cannot see that there is such a thing as light upon the best ends and enjoyments of life.²

As over against the darkness, Christ is the light of the world which opposes and triumphs over darkness. As Lenski puts it:

Of its own accord this gracious gift of God shines into the world's night. Its glorious, saving radiance attracts all whom it meets and draws them to remain with this light. Everyone who yields to this drawing power "shall not walk in darkness," shall escape from its deadly power, shall no longer be lost, eventually to perish in the world's desert...(but) "shall have the light of life."...(He shall walk in the light) because this light shall actually penetrate him and become his personal possession.³

The inner penetration of the light has the effect of that life which is an ongoing, progressing spiritual union with God. This union in Christ is stated by John in the prologue:

1 Lenski, op. cit., p. 594.
2 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., pp. 279-280.
3 Lenski, op. cit., p. 595-596.

"In him was life, and this life was the light of men."¹ Here Jesus speaks of the light of life. This may mean either the light which imparts or illuminates life or that which issues from life. The figure is so all-inclusive that, as Bernard states:

When we apply such concepts to God or Christ, we cannot treat them as if we knew them to be fundamentally distinct. They are qualities or aspects of Absolute Being, and it is beyond our powers to define them adequately or explain their mutual relation.²

At any rate, Jesus uses the expression, "of life" to point out that He is really and eternally what these material things (bread, water, light) are in the present physical world. The time may come when men shall no longer need to be sustained by bread, but never when they shall not need life; and this fundamental gift Christ pledges Himself evermore to give. And when He names Himself the light of life, He indicates it is on the true, eternal life of man He sheds light.³

Christ the Light, in the reference of life eternal, is "pure truth, pure holiness, pure blessedness."⁴ Again these factors are set as divine, clear as light, pure as light, radiant as light, over against human falsehood and ignorance, human sin and impurity, human woe and death. When Jesus says "I am the Light of the world," He speaks of Himself as the focus of radiant light, the shining image of divine truth, holiness, and blessed-

1 John 1:4.

2 Bernard, J. H., op. cit., Vol. II, p. 293.

3 Dods, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 278.

4 DuBose, William P.: The Gospel in the Gospels, (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1908) p. 235.

ness appearing in the world, -- completely illuminating the darkness of falsehood, sin, and sorrow by His victorious radiance, which along with the illumination and victory, becomes the gift of the believer in Him.

One last word needs to be said about the connection of joy with the light. The imagery of the Feast of Tabernacles has been discussed -- the feast which was connected with gladness and rejoicing in a manner more free than any other of the festivals.¹ In the article on symbolism, the Hastings Dictionary is descriptive:

Light represented to the Orientals the highest human good. The most joyful emotions and pleasing sensations are described under imagery derived from light (I. Kings 11:36; Psalms 97:11). It was only natural that there should follow a transition from corporeal to spiritual things, so that light came to typify true religion and the happiness which it brings.²

Possession of the light of life in Christ is a gift which changes personality. Radiance and spiritual glow, serenity, and real enlightenment become the marks of transformation in the spiritual progress of one who is in the guidance of Him who is the Light.

Christ as the light sweeps onward to new regions, and thither it is our charge to follow Him...Our part is clear-- to look to the Light steadily, to receive the Light heedfully, to spread the Light untiringly. The Light cannot mislead us, and cannot fail us: it is the Light of Life.³

1 Westcott, B. F., op. cit., p. 116.

2 Hastings, James, loc. cit.

3 Westcott, B. F.: The Revelation of the Father, (London and New York: Macmillan and Company, 1887) pp. 59-60.

4. The Cross: Symbol of Available Life

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself. But this he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die.¹

They took Jesus therefore; and he went out, bearing the cross for himself, unto the place called the place of the skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha; where they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. And there was written, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."²

The cross is mentioned only four times in the Gospel of John, all of them occurring in the nineteenth chapter in connection with the actualities of the crucifixion.³ Yet the cross and its significance in Jesus' mission is a constant undertone in the Gospel, and it comes to the forefront in several places, chief of them the one quoted above. In these words of Jesus, all the symbolism of the cross becomes plain, though not expressly stated. "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto myself."

The cross is not the oldest symbol of the Christian Church, perhaps because it was so familiar and thus easily identified by friend and foe alike, and also because it was for long years painfully suggestive of execution. However, it has come to have a deeper meaning than that of any other: it is not merely the instrument of the sufferings of Christ, but represents Himself

1 John 12:32-33.

2 John 19:17-19.

3 John 19:17, 19, 25, 31.

suffering.¹ Further, it is the great symbol of the Christian life of faith in the risen Lord. As such, it has become the most important Christian figure representative of sacrifice and redemption. Its meaning is clear and plain -- for it speaks of eternal life and resurrection through faith.²

The cross is therefore a symbol of life, of life available to all men. It has a power of attraction which is the greatest that the world has ever known, and which is dependent upon the sacrifice made upon it by the Son of Man.³ For it is Jesus and His death alone which makes the cross a symbol of faith and of life. All of the other figures of this section: the lamb, the bread, the light, have had symbolic value before being applied as ultimate representations of Christ's redemption. But it is Christ alone who makes the cross a symbol.

The life of Jesus poured out upon the cross was done in sacrifice -- that "through death he might overcome him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."⁴ Although He gave His life, He did not lose His life, for He had power to take it again, and being risen, He "dieth no more."⁵ His resurrection makes His

1 Clement, Clara Erskine: Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints, (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1895) p. 3.

2 Benson, George W.: The Cross, Its History and Symbolism, (Buffalo, N. Y.: Privately printed, 1934) pp. 11, 23.

3 Bernard, J. H., op. cit., Vol. II, p. 442.

4 Hebrews 2:14.

5 Romans 10:9.

death a victory of life -- life available to all men, for in being lifted up He draws all men to Himself.

The death of Christ draws us because in it the irresistible tenderness of the heart of God is laid bare. It has a universal bearing upon every man because it is the act of the Divine, and because it is real life which Christ offers in the cross. His life given there becomes available to others in a vital, personal relationship which has an intelligent, enlightening reference in the pursuit of human satisfaction and eternal well being. The death of Christ makes this life available to all men. It is effective in ourselves as we appropriate it through a living and active faith in the crucified and risen Redeemer. Of this the Cross is a valid, appropriate symbol.

The disciples did not understand this symbol, either, at the time it was discussed by Jesus or when it was fulfilled. Later it came to mean much to them in their understanding of the significance and meaning of Jesus' life and mission. St. John himself, as Westcott says,¹ is careful to explain this point of "delayed action" among the disciples, which happened in the case of many of Christ's teachings, and over nearly all of those with symbolic reference.

¹ Westcott, B. F.: Gospel of St. John, p. lxxv.

C. SUMMARY

In the study of figures representing Christ as the Redeemer, the significance of the lamb, the bread, the light, and the cross has been pursued. It was noted that the symbol of the Lamb of God represents the atoning sacrifice of Christ; the innocent, unblemished, spotless, uncomplaining Saviour taking away the sin of the whole world by bearing its burden upon the cross to death.

The Bread is a figure of Christ the Bread of Life, whose flesh and blood must be eaten by anyone who desires a continued, healthy life with reference to the eternal. Real nourishment is that of the soul, and it comes from a possession of such intimate and personal association with the living Jesus as is represented by the figure of eating Him.

Christ the Light of the world is the complete illumination of His followers. He is permanent and without any lack, in contrast to the fleeting benefit from lighting the candles at the Feast of Tabernacles, and to the transitory, partial illumination of the Israelites by the pillar of fire. Illumination is given in the sense of inner guidance, for the purpose that anyone who follows may escape being lost in the darkness because he "shall have the light of life." The light is given that it may be followed, in order to lead him who has an abiding, lighted, radiant faith in Christ into that eternal life where "night shall be no more."

The cross is the symbol of available life -- available to all men because of the sacrifice of Jesus in giving His life on calvary. Because He was lifted up there, death is overcome, and Christ Himself enters into glory, drawing "all men" unto Himself.

The study of the symbols continues to show how the disciples were able to come to a later understanding of many incidents and factors in Jesus' life which they did not immediately comprehend. It also reveals the fact that none of the figures is able to contain all the elements of its particular representation of Christ:-- He always oversteps the limits of the symbol. On the other hand, the study shows the advantage of this representative means of unfolding spiritual truths, many of which would be most difficult to put in human terms at all without the help of definite earthly figures.

CHAPTER IV

SYMBOLS ILLUSTRATING THE FELLOWSHIP
OF THE SAVIOUR WITH THE REDEEMED

CHAPTER IV

SYMBOLS ILLUSTRATING THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SAVIOUR WITH THE REDEEMED

A. INTRODUCTION

Among the symbols in St. John's Gospel there are a number which may be classed as illustrative of the relationship between the Saviour and His disciples. In this group inquiry will be made with respect to two: The Shepherd and the sheep, the Vine and branches.

Other figures which may have bearing upon the stated classification are those of the marriage feast and the King. These, however, are doubtful cases as symbols in this Gospel, and are hence not included in the detailed study.

It will be the purpose in this chapter to ascertain the significance of the symbolism with respect to the meaning and points of reference of Christ's association with His own disciples.

B. STUDY OF THE SYMBOLS

1. The Shepherd: Symbol of Unquestioned Leadership

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. He that is a hireling, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them; he fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine own,

and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock, one shepherd.¹

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.²

The symbol of the shepherd, like that of the lamb, is among the oldest and best loved in Christian history. The earliest purely symbolic representation of the twelve apostles was that of twelve sheep surrounding Christ, the Good Shepherd.³ Likewise, the favorite symbol of those who used the catacombs was the Good Shepherd.⁴ Even in the industrial atmosphere of the twentieth century, when practically every detail of the figure of the pastoral life must be explained for proper understanding, the Good Shepherd remains among the most meaningful and most used representations of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Good Shepherd is the symbol of leadership, with relation to His people. He is the shepherd of the flock, the leader of His people. His leadership is attested in the first place, by the contrast between His willingness to lay down His life for the sheep and the cowardice of the hireling who flees at the first skirmish with danger. In the second place, He is the leader because of His knowledge of the sheep and theirs of Him;

1 John 10:11-16.

2 John 10:27-28.

3 Clement, Clara E., op. cit., p. 24.

4 Hastings, James, loc. cit.

and in the third place, because of His concern for "other sheep," to bring them into the flock.

(I) The first test of leadership lies in motive, and it is Christ's motive of thorough and constant concern for the flock which makes his leadership natural and outstanding. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." A complete devotion to this cause leads to absolute sacrifice of self. This is the outward standard of the shepherd's work.¹

Christ has come for this purpose; this is His central mission, for the wolf is already attacking, and has scattered the flock. The controlling motive of Jesus in all His actions is this mission of the cross, and it is only within the reference of the redemptive mission that the significance of the figure of the shepherd can be understood. For He is the Good Shepherd, or as the Greek has it, "the Shepherd the Good," ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς. This means that He is not merely good in the sense of being a better shepherd than others, but that He is a shepherd in a sense which is impossible for anybody else.²

In utter contrast is the motive of the hireling, whose own the sheep are not. The hireling may be someone who is picked to oversee the sheep, perhaps temporarily, but the context seems

1 Westcott, B. F., The Revelation of the Father, p. 80.

2 See Lenski's discussion on this statement, op. cit., pp. 722-723.

to link him more closely to the thieves and robbers who illegally seek to lay hands upon the sheep in verses one and ten. The contrast, however, is not so much over ownership as over the motive for shepherding. The hireling has no mission; no sense of being sent or commissioned to the care of the flock; no interest in the extras which anyone must put into his work in order to become an expert in service and helpfulness; no responsibility toward his post; no care for the sheep. His sole motive is his own benefit, his own position as leader, the control and prestige, and any compensations which will give himself the satisfaction he wants out of life. Placed in the context of chapter nine, with Jesus' healing of the blind man and His guidance of his spiritual development, in sharp contrast to the trivial anxiety of the Pharisees over the Sabbath regulations, it takes little searching to find an example of the hireling.¹ The application should by no means be limited to the Pharisees, however, for false motives lead hirelings into attempts at Christian labor in all generations. At the same time, this contrast cannot be carried too far, for Jesus' intention is to center the emphasis upon Himself and His relationship to the flock.

The thought of this relation is well stated by Canon Westcott in terms of the disciples:

They had found a new kind of discipleship in which the Master lived for His scholars, and not the scholars for the master;

1 Bernard, J. H., op. cit., Vol. II, p.

in which the relation was not one of contract but of nature, in which dangers were to be expected, but these not greater than love could overcome. Christ the Good Shepherd trans-figured for ever the method, the conception, the fulfillment of leadership.¹

The willingness of Christ to give His life for the sheep is not merely a good motive, but a saving reality. He lays down His life not in unsuccessful defense of the sheep, but as a substitute which spares them -- He dies in their stead, for the successful purpose of making their life more abundant. Here the significance is extended beyond the bounds of the figure, but the implication is that the Good Shepherd is the only one who can give His life with results which bring disaster for the wolf, abundant life in the highest sense for the sheep, and full success for the continuing shepherd-flock relationship.

To summarize, emphasis upon Christ's readiness to lay down His life for the sheep is two fold. First, this willingness, with the implication that it has been already accomplished, is the proper motive which a shepherd must have if he is to be "the Good." Second, the results of that action are all in the interests of the sheep, again in sharp contrast to what happens when they fall into the care of the hireling.²

(II) Christ's leadership of the flock is attested, secondly, by His knowledge of the sheep and theirs of Him. "I know mine own, and mine own know me." The underlying sympathy between

1 Westcott, B. F., *The Revelation of the Father*, p. 81.

2 See Lenski, R. C. H., *op. cit.*, pp. 722-734, for an extensive treatment of the figure of the Shepherd laying down His life. Cf. also Westcott, B. F., *The Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 153-154.

the leader and the flock results in a mutual affection which is the law of the shepherd's life. In this relation, too, it is the interests of the sheep which are at stake and everything circles around them. "Mine own" sheep are all whose living faith in heart and soul causes them to belong to Jesus who gives His life for them only to continue as the eternal Great Shepherd of the soul.¹ In silent contrast are others who refuse to yield themselves to Jesus' leading, or to any dependence upon His great sacrifice. These, however, do not enter into the symbolism here.

Christ bases His claim to be the true Shepherd and Lord of men upon His power to attract them to Him. If the attraction of the cross does not cause us to identify Him as different from all others; to trust ourselves to Him; and to expect different results of life from association with Him, then He does not expect that any other force will draw us to acknowledge Him.

As the Shepherd, He must draw the sheep. They cannot be driven, like cattle, but must be led out of trust and earned devotion. This is a factor of oriental shepherding which must be pointed out even in agricultural regions in the American west today. Mass production and mechanical help has made it possible to shepherd sheep with a jeep, and such caretaking is completely out of character with the relationship expressed

1 II Peter 2:25.

by Jesus, which is expressed more fully in the opening parable of the chapter.

The whole experience of Christ as our Shepherd gives Him an increasing knowledge of us.¹ As the shepherd is the first to see the new born lamb, so Christ looks after His children from the moment (and long before) they are born anew as His disciples. He observes their growth and its hindrances, watches their ways as disciples and thus becomes intimately acquainted with His lambs and sheep, in that perfect knowledge of Him who "sits at the right hand of the majesty on high."²

On the other hand, the sheep know the Shepherd also, and Christ's lambs and sheep, if they are to be in this relationship, must increase in knowledge of Him. As Dods puts it:

Slowly but surely grows in every Christian a reciprocal knowledge of Christ. More and more clearly does His Person stand out as the one on whom our expectation must rest. With Him we are brought into connection by every sin of ours, and by every hope. Is it not He before whom and about whom our hearts thrill and tremble time after time with a depth and awe of emotion which nothing else excites? Is it not to Him we owe it that this day we live in peace, knowing that our God is a loving Father? Is it not still His grace we must learn more deeply, His patient righteous way we must more exactly fall in with, if we are to forget our loved sin in the love of God, ourselves in the Eternal One?³

The leadership of Christ is an unquestioned mastery, involving complete submission on the part of the sheep. In Him is their entire trust, their care and concern for pasturage, their

1 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., pp. 332-334.

2 Hebrews 1:3.

3 Dods, Marcus, op. cit., p. 333.

protection and health, their whole welfare. The relationship is one of mutual understanding, of mutual recognition of the indispensable character of Christ to the soul; -- which grows to that perfect empathy: "I know my own, and my own know me." The only parallel which is known to this mutual understanding is the perfect understanding of the Father and the Son. Into this perfect harmony of feeling and purpose, Christ introduces His people. Their thoughts are to be:

...disengaged from what is trivial, and expanded to take in the designs of the Eternal Mind. Gradually their tastes and affections are loosened from lower attachments, and are wrought to a perfect sympathy with what is holy and abiding.¹

(III) Finally, Christ's leadership as the Good Shepherd is attested by His concern for the "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold." With reference to the figure, these are not sheep of another fold, to be won by warfare or trickery, but untended sheep in the midst of attack or danger. No one who is properly oriented in the attitude of shepherding will leave these sheep to their fate while there is anything which he can do to help. In small scattered bands or by individuals they must be gathered to the flock -- and cared for. There are wounds to be healed, trust to be won, -- in short, they are to be led to the same relationship of mutual understanding as that which prevails among those who have been already His own. Further, this relationship of harmony and oneness is the character also

¹ Ibid., p. 334.

of the flock -- it is one flock, one band, one unit -- the one spiritual body of the Communion of Saints, all brethren by faith under one Master -- serving and following the unquestioned leadership of the Good Shepherd, in the abundant life.

2. The Vine and Branches: Symbol of Productive Attachment

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit. Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; and so shall ye be my disciples.¹

In the discourse on the vine and the branches, Jesus weaves the symbolism of the figure together with the explanation of reality with such blending as to make a unity of the whole. These threads run side by side through the discourse, until the figure is dropped entirely in the realities of the spiritual teaching.

Much has been written with respect to the setting, from the point of view that Jesus and the disciples probably took note of an actual vine or its representation. Although this may have been the case, it is also entirely possible that the figure

¹ John 15:1-8.

grew naturally out of the supper itself, for Jesus had said, "I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine till I drink it new in my Father's kingdom."¹

The image of the vine was not new to the disciples. Isaiah² and the Psalmist³ had used it, and Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea less fully.⁴ As Bernard points out, however, the figure is always illustrative of a degenerate Israel, unproductive except for wild grapes.⁵ Jesus had spoken of the vineyard in at least two parables.⁶ He introduces the symbol of the vine here in a natural way, and endows the figure, as usual, with a new depth and richness which goes beyond the image itself. In the words of Canon Westcott:

The thoughts of fifteen hundred years, thoughts of beauty, of growth, of luxuriance, of fertility, of joy, were gathered round the vine, and at the end Christ says in the passage before us that all those thoughts were fulfilled in Him: I am the true -- the ideal -- vine. "In Me," that is, "in Me who have taken humanity to Myself, all which men have seen in the life of the plant and transferred to themselves is realised...The people of God have in very deed, like the Vine, a common being...They are bound together by a vital unity... They are prepared for large fruitfulness...I am the Vine: ye are the branches."⁷

There are three elements in the symbolism of this figure, for Jesus says: "I am the vine, my Father is the husbandman,

1 Matthew 26:29.

2 Isaiah 5:1 ff.

3 Psalms 80:8-16.

4 Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15:2; 19:10; Hosea 10:1.

5 Bernard, H. J., op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 477-478.

6 Matthew 20:1-16; 21:33-46.

7 Westcott, B. F., The Revelation of the Father, pp. 120-121.

ye are the branches." As over against every other vine, -- of vineyard, scrollwork, or the imagery of the degenerate vine of Israel, Jesus is the true or genuine vine. Here is the core both of the figure and the reality, as Jesus utters another in the sequence of significant "I AM" statements which John records.¹

As Lenski puts it:

Jesus is not merely like a vine, he is more: the actual original, of which all natural vines, genuine in the domain of nature, are only images. As the real and genuine vine in this supreme sense he exceeds all others who may in some way also be called vines, and he stands forever in contrast with all those who are not real but only spurious and pretending vines. Jesus alone embodies the complete will and purposes of God, which others only foreshadow or reveal in part, and which still others only pretend to reveal.²

The branches are the disciples. Their function in the vine is to produce "much fruit." They are totally dependent upon the vine both for the resources of fruit-bearing and for the sources which sustain their own life. No branch can produce fruit "of itself." Thus the only way anyone can be productive in life is to be attached to Christ, the only real vine.

It is God the Father who is the author of this living organism of fruit-bearing. He is the husbandman whose will has established all the action of Redemption which makes possible any living relationship at all between the Lord and any man. The vine -- branches unity is possible by the will of God, who also tends and nourishes this great plant with full intent upon the

1 John 4:26; 6:35, 48, 51; 8:12, 58; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 17:24; 18:37.

2 Lenski, R. C. H., op. cit., p. 1026.

utmost in productive capacity. To this end, He has both wisdom and authority to cut off withered and dead branches, and to cut back all unproductive growth of the branches which run to vines instead of to fruit.

The point of the symbol, then, is not merely the fruit, mentioned six times in the passage, but the method by which Christ produces results. This method is through that relationship of life which involves attachment to Himself as the root and source of life's energy and resources which are needful for fruit-bearing, the positive and indispensable function of everyone who lives. This method of attachment to Christ for fruit-bearing is God's own method of life, and He supports and tends the living branches to this end with His own care.

Productiveness through attachment to Christ is in contrast to any other method of bearing fruit, -- especially with reference to any human ideas of self-culture. The contention of the disciples about greatness is still in the background, and the symbolism of the vine-branches emphasizes the imperative need for every true branch to find its source of life and good in sincere and real attachment to the Christ the true vine.

Although the figure does not develop the manner in which attachment is accomplished, the appeal, "Abide in me," throws light on a contrast between the figure and its application, in which the symbol is overstepped by its reality. The vine and its branches form a natural unity, but in life, no one has an automatic, naturally growing connection with Christ. The only

way for a branch which is off the vine to become joined to the vine is through grafting. This is done not by any slipshod association, like putting the branch alongside the vine or tying it on. The only result of that would be immediate withering for lack of sufficient contact with the life of the vine. Grafting entails a cutting through of the branch and cutting into the vine so that all the sap-vessels of each may come to an inner contact. In like manner, the only way a person may be attached as a branch to Christ, the Vine, is to be grafted into Him. There must be the same vital connection between the inmost natures of both the disciple and Christ as between branch and vine. In the completed work of Christ's redemption His inmost nature is laid bare for every man. Through His word of this redemption men are led to Him, cleansed through the "washing of regeneration," and grafted into Him. The problem is getting the "branch" to the graft, and then getting the graft to "stick."

For this reason Christ says with all His compassionate concern "abide in me, and I in you." It is an appeal to remain attached as a branch to Him. This is a valid appeal, because people are not passive branches without a will, but free and sensitive humans, who find it hard and painful to be severed from the root of the old tree and grafted to a new. Even after the grafting has taken place there is danger of the branch being loosened, or of its running all to wood and leaves. The gardener must watch, -- as God does over his children, to prevent these dangers. In the first case watchfulness and protection

is essential until the attachment is permanent. In the other the process is by pruning, for the branch is not left to nature, to waste its life by flourishing in its own size. Vine wood is no fruit, and fruit-bearing is the essential responsibility of the vine's branches.¹

Fruit-bearing in the Christian life can be no independent process of self development. The fruition of life in Christ does not come through the cultivation of human attainments, but through submission to the tending and pruning of God, and through the attachment of a grafted union with Christ the Vine. No branch can be sufficient unto itself. There is no room in the Christian picture for any selfishness or strictly "self-propelled" idea of life.

The truth of this basic attitude carries along into the symbolism of attachment to the vine. As no branch can bear fruit independently of the vine root, neither can any branch use the nourishment of the vine for self-attainment in its own growth. The Great Vinedresser looks for fruit, and will cut back the branch that runs to wood and foliage, or else must cut it off entirely.

Neither is there any other vine which has the ability, resources and character to produce approvable fruit. No attachment to Israel, to the Temple and its sacrifices, or even to the highest concepts of the sacred Torah can result in the

¹ Cf. Dods, Marcus, op. cit., pp. 181-184.

fruitfulness that God desires in His people. All the devotion and constancy of such a life is but an expression of man's attempt at independence, too, because it does not represent the unity of productive attachment to Christ, the Vine. The symbolism of the vine reiterates God's faithful word: "In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."¹

The symbolism of the vine speaks, further, to the effect that fruit-bearing is the natural outcome of the vine-branches relationship. Productivity according to Christ's method involves no picture of people making bricks without straw under the lash of Egypt's task masters.² God is no slave-driver. Neither is it a system of duty quotas, under penalty of loss of rations, extra duties, or exile to Siberia for failure to complete them. God is no all-commanding dictator; nor an Uncle Sam calling for almost superhuman patriotic efforts; nor even a Papal Father demanding dutiful obedience. Fruitage is the natural outcome of being joined to Christ and having His life flow through the personality like sap comes to the branch from the vine. A Christian who is not fruitful is no Christian. And the unproductive branch must go, -- not because of arbitrary regulations, but because it is out of character with respect to the living plant. "He is cast forth as a branch, and is withered."

1 Acts 4:15.

2 Exodus 1-2.

Again Westcott summarizes this thought in the following:

The widest and grandest views of our faith, such as this revelation of the Lord through the Vine opens to us, are not given only to fill our imaginations, but to move us to action. And there is a marvellous beauty in the aspect under which they present the last results of the Christian life. These are from this point of view in the strictest sense fruits and not works. They are seen to belong to the operation of an indwelling immanent power, and not to the exercise of personal will. They are, so to speak, the spontaneous, necessary, natural, outcome of what the Christian truly is. When he is regarded in himself, then the notion of design, of effort, of work rightly comes in; but when, as here, he is regarded in his essential relation to Christ then all he does, all he can do, is the due effect of that life with which he is inspired.¹

The nature of the fruit is not a part of the figure. The emphasis is upon the outcome of productivity as a natural result of being grafted to the vine. Everything which will be well pleasing in the sight of God, the Husbandman, is the fruit of the Christian organism. For the fruit must be in character with the plant from which it comes. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"² The fruit of the branch which is grafted into Christ the Vine will be Christlike. "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control."³ The fruit of the branch is growth in Christian sanctification. Yet it is the vine which bears both the branches and the fruit, and penetrates both with its sap.⁴

1 Westcott, B. F., op. cit., pp. 126-127.

2 Matthew 7:16.

3 Galatians 5:23-24.

4 Cf. Lenski, op. cit., p. 1035.

The entire symbolism breathes with the two alternatives of "much fruit" or nothing at all. God the husbandman seeks constant growth in spiritual productivity. There is no possibility of being content with little yield. This is no ordinary vine, for its glory lies in an unlimited life and vitality, and no true branch will attempt to make it less. The only alternative is nothing,¹ the end result of all attempts at fruit producing aimed toward the branch's own glory and self-culture.²

The vine and branches speak as the symbol of productive attachment. The basis of the life relationship between vine and branch, -- between Christ and disciple, is a sincere and genuine attachment. The purpose of this relationship is fruit-bearing in abundance. No branch is attached to the vine for its own benefit, -- no disciple is permitted to draw on the living Christ for his own personal, willful advantage. Christian fruit is the natural outcome of Christian salvation for all true disciples.

The end result of the relationship is a fellowship unequalled for its intimacy, its love, its wonderfully harmonious unity. Lenski quotes one of the Church's theologians of the past in expressing the fine qualities of being grafted into Christ in productive attachment:

"All the holy thoughts, words, and works of Christians, which, made sweet by the taste of love, delight God, are altogether

1 Westcott, B. F., Gospel According to St. John, p. 218.

2 Lenski, loc. cit.

fruit of the branches which remain in the vine, with the vine's living sap in them, are altogether gifts received from the abundance of Christ, who is the heart's treasure of love, the mouth's spice of love, the hand's power of love."¹

C. SUMMARY

From the study of the symbols in this chapter, the relationship of the Saviour with His disciples has been noted. It was seen that the figure of the Shepherd represents the leadership of Christ over His flock, -- his believing people. Christ's leadership is attested by the fact of His laying down His life for the sheep; it is Christ the Redeemer who is their leader. It is further attested by His personal knowledge of His own, and theirs of Him; and by His concern and vital aid for "Other sheep -- not of this fold."

The symbol of the vine portrays the intimacy of fellowship between Christ and His people, as well as its objective or function. The attachment of disciples to Christ is that of branches to the vine, -- a living unity. Christ the Vine, like Christ the Shepherd, is the living Christ, crucified and risen for men. The function is productive, -- that results of fruit-bearing may be shown in men's lives. Selfishness in the Christian life is inimical to that life. For it is the fruit of Christ's own nature in life and word and work, -- the fruit of holiness, --

¹ Quoted by Lenski, loc. cit.

which is to be the increasingly abundant result of attachment to Him.

The symbolism of this relationship is found to be both singular and collective. Each sheep, each branch, has its own individual and personal connection with the Lord. Nevertheless, the figure in each case represents the whole, -- the shepherd leads the flock; the vine channels fruit-producing sap to its branches. Apart from the flock, there are none but lost sheep. Apart from the living branches nothing but withered, unfruitful, burning sticks are to be found. Only through being equally one of the flock with all the rest does a sheep share in the Shepherd's leadership, and only through a living connection with the vine on equality with all the other branches, does a branch share the vine's life and productive capacity.

A wealth of meaning lies in these figures of the relationship of the Lord to His people, which has been a motivating force to Christians in all ages. The shepherd leads and does not drive the sheep. The vine's productive capacity is a natural process not forced upon the branch by an external compulsion. Christ's leadership also draws His sheep to Himself, and His unity with the branches is a relationship which is an effective method of fruit producing, not strained, but yet fully dependent upon Him. This highly important relationship, otherwise abstract and indefinite, is thus made clear, vivid, and concrete by the use

which Jesus makes of the symbolism in connection with utterly familiar areas of the natural life.

The significance of the symbolism in this section has thus been two-fold:

1. To make clear the relation of Christ with humanity, as a shepherd seeking the lost sheep for His flock, in order to gently lead them in eternal blessing.
2. To make clear the idea of union with Christ, as a living attachment of intimacy like sheep with their shepherd, and of unity like branches with the vine.

CHAPTER V

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SYMBOLISM
TO THE IMPACT OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

CHAPTER V

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SYMBOLISM TO THE IMPACT OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

A. INTRODUCTION

The use of symbolism by St. John conveys some important lessons and insights into the character of Jesus, His redemptive mission, and His relation of fellowship with His disciples. The Gospel has leaned especially upon the figures under study, as well as upon others, for the portrayal of these insights. On the other hand, as has been observed at various points, the symbolism is not the key to the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, but rather a tool of expression. The time has come for a deeper inquiry into this phase of the problem, to note more accurately the part played by the symbolic in the development of the total impact of the Gospel message.

In an attempt at some penetration of this question, it is the purpose of this study to investigate so far as possible the part played by symbolism in the development of the author's understanding of Christ; its use as an aid in implementing the purpose of the Gospel; and its effectiveness as an aid to bringing the reader to faith in Christ.

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLISM
IN THE AUTHOR'S UNDERSTANDING OF CHRIST

The "delayed action" of the disciples in arriving at an enlightened understanding of the significance of most of Jesus' teachings has been previously referred to.¹ Westcott develops this factor in his introduction:

St. John himself is careful to explain that all which he saw when he wrote his Gospel was not clear to the disciples at once. The words of the Lord to St. Peter had a wider application than to any one detail: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt come to know hereafter (xiii, 7). The Resurrection was the first great help to this advance in knowledge (ii. 22, xii. 16).²

Since the resurrection was the strategic center in the unfolding to men of Christ's redemption, it is natural that it should be a definite key to John's own understanding of Christ. According to the Gospel, he was the first believer in the resurrection.³ D. A. Hayes has written a vivid account of the scene at the tomb when Peter and John came to investigate the exciting report of the women:

John was quick of sight and quick of intuition...With a face radiant with the greatest thought which had ever occurred to these two men, he turned to Peter and said, "I see and I believe." (v.8)... "The spices are all here and undisturbed. The clothes have not been touched by anyone...Peter, there has been a resurrection!"
...It was a sublime inference, this first dawning of the resurrection hope...John saw and he believed. He was the first

1 Ante, pp. 27, 43, 61, 63.

2 Westcott, B. F., op. cit., p. lxxv.

3 John 20:8.

believer in the resurrection, and his belief was founded upon circumstantial evidence aided by spiritual insight and loving intuition.¹

The processes of reflection or discussion through which the disciples passed in the days following their awakening to the fact of the resurrection are not explained. No doubt they combed their minds and prayed for recollection of all in their experience with Jesus which would assist them in living with this new tremendous fact: The Lord lives.

John, as one of the three "inner circle" disciples and counted worthy of Jesus' special love, must have been arrested by the person of Jesus, and powerfully gripped by Him in his entire spiritual life. His contemplative nature may have enabled him to recall many of the experiences connected with the person of Jesus which others had forgotten. As Weiss says of him:

If we think of this contemplative nature brought face to face with Jesus, then it could not be any one thing Jesus taught or brought or promised, but only His person itself, which seized his spiritual life, and concentrated on itself his undivided regard. To sink himself ever deeper into its whole height and significance; to seek and find in it on all sides the highest salvation; to become ever more sure and more joyful in the ever more complete surrender to this possession, must have been the goal of all his spiritual struggles and life. Thus the whole view of Jesus' person, so full of life, and the saving significance of it, grew on him, ... (and) formed the starting point of his whole doctrinal views.²

In John's reflection of Jesus and the new relationship, it is certain that with the key experience of the resurrection, he

1 Hayes, Doremus A.: *The Resurrection Fact*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Cokesbury Press, 1932) pp. 42-44.

2 Weiss, Bernhard: *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1879), Vol. II, pp. 317-318.

was able to find new meaning in nearly all of Jesus' teachings. How much the symbolism which the Lord had used contributed to this more complete new understanding can only be estimated, -- but it must have had its effect. In the light of the resurrection, John must have called to mind again, for example, the lesson of the grain of wheat, the testimony about the lamb of God, and the incident of the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. All these would enrich the understanding of Jesus so much the more when related to the tremendous fact of the resurrection.

Likewise the humility of Jesus and His infinite love would stand out in even sharper outline now; and the figures of the bread of life and the light of the world would come to help John understand the spiritual significance of Christ, if not at once, then shortly in the unfolding of events as the Church began to grow. The symbolism of the leadership of the shepherd and the attachment of the branches to the vine, too, must have meant a great deal to the mutual working together of the disciples in those first days of the church. The types and figures of the Old Testament would have meaning in their symbolic application to the risen Christ.

The significance of symbolism as a factor in John's own understanding of Christ may now be summarized. From the study of the symbols and the manner in which they are used some general factors involved in this appraisal may be set forth.

1. Symbolism serves to state the abstract in concrete illustrations which represent the abstract reality. This aids

the understanding. Much in the essential meaning of Jesus to the apostle would have remained in abstract terms were it not for the down-to-earth symbols which made clear the redemptive nature of His mission, the divine character of His personality, and the intimate nature of the relationship of His disciples to Himself.¹

2. It aids the memory. As was noted in connection with Jesus' description of Himself as the Bread of Life,² the symbol is often given in such striking fashion as to make an arresting impact upon the mind, to leave the setting in such unforgettable memory that the spiritual idea also remains vivid and clear.
3. It stimulates reflection as to meaning. This encouragement or prod to thinking has the effect of causing the mind to be intent upon the spiritual meaning because of interest in the symbol.³ As was also noted in several areas, the symbol is often only the starting point of the meaning of the spiritual reality. Overstepping the figure, the reality goes on to the soaring heights of glorious instruction in the blessed mysteries of God.
4. It shows a unity between the natural and the spiritual worlds, as if God had made the natural world out of purpose to

1 Ante, pp. 2, 7; cf. Westcott, B. F.: "The Revelation of the Father, p. 3.

2 Ante, p. 43.

3 Ante, p. 7.

educate men in the spiritual.¹ Jesus was a master at choosing the plain homespun symbols of everyday life, and clothing them with the sublime in heavenly meaning. John must have come to his understanding of Christ in large part through these common, well known figures, because he selects that kind of terms in which to present the Divine Jesus, Son of God.

5. It serves in many cases to relate the Gospel to the previous history of redemption. Symbols like the lamb, the bread, the light cannot become instructive in their full meaning without relation to the manner of God's former dealings with His people. In this light of history, however, they are enriched and their significance is magnified. John drew on his familiarity with the Old Testament and its spiritual message, coupled with a reflection on the symbols, for an illumined understanding of Jesus.²

That John attributed a great deal of significance to the symbolic in helping him to understand Jesus is evident, further, from the use which he makes of the figures in the Gospel. This factor now becomes the object of study.

1 Ante, p. 6, 16, 27.

2 e. g., John 1:29; 7:47; 12:14-16; 19:24, 40; 20:27.

C. SYMBOLISM AS AN AID TOWARD
EFFECTIVE EXPRESSION
OF THE AUTHOR'S PURPOSE IN THE GOSPEL

John wrote his account of the life of Jesus for the purpose of creating belief in Him as "the Christ, the Son of God."¹ He did this by means of a selection of events and actions in Jesus' life which took place in the presence of the disciples. It is indicated that the selection was that of comparatively few of the things which Jesus did, which means that those things which were chosen were considered highly meaningful to the fulfillment of the purpose by the author.

The symbolism with which Jesus made plain the great spiritual character of Himself and His mission holds an important place in John's selection. Its significance is all the more to be observed when it is noted that John is the only one of the Evangelists who mentions any of the incidents out of which the symbols under perusal in this study arose. The consideration of this observation is inclusive even of the cross, for its use as a symbol was not so much through the actuality of the crucifixion as through Jesus' statement, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Myself."²

1 John 20:31.

2 John 12:32.

All the Gospel writers mention the baptism of Jesus by John, but only St. John includes John's testimony about the Lamb of God. Every one has the account of feeding the 5000, but only John says anything about the bread of life. All give testimony to the last week in Jerusalem and Christ's sayings in the Temple, but only John brings up Jesus' discussions on the grain of wheat and the cross as symbols of released, available life. Every one speaks about the last supper, but only John mentions the foot-washing or the discourse on the vine. The section containing the accounts of the light and the shepherd is unmentioned by all the Synoptics.

In the light of this exclusive use of the symbols their significance in the Fourth Gospel stands out all the more. With reference to the study in its previous sections, the following conclusions may be set forth as to the use of symbolism as an aid to the expression of John's purpose to uphold Jesus as the Christ:

1. Symbolism makes clear the relation of Christ to humanity.

The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world, and is the only sin-remover that is known to anyone. The bread is the only Bread of Life -- "My flesh for the life of the world."¹ The light is not exclusive, Jesus says, but is for the world. The cross is intended to draw "all men." Bread, light, -- these are universal needs of man. The symbolism makes clear

1 John 6:51.

that Christ in His spiritual capacity is the most important universal need of all.

2. It makes clear the purpose of an atoning death. The symbol of the lamb was, as was noted in Chapter III,¹ one that was well known among the Jews in their religious exercises. Always it was substitutionary in meaning, -- the sacrifice of the lamb was made in order that the blood of the people might be spared. The application of this symbol to Jesus immediately links His death with that of the lamb, and opens to man the reality of the impossible, except to Him who is Divine; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by suffering death for it Himself.

The cross as a symbol, on the other hand, shows the effectiveness of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Not unto oblivion did Christ die, but unto glory -- "I will draw all men unto me."

3. It makes clear the Christian method of producing new life. As the wheat in dying released its energy into an entire new living plant capable of producing many fold, so Jesus in giving His life released its power that His life might be produced and harvested far and wide, in the lives of disciples. They, in turn, are to adopt the principle of giving of self instead of grasping, as the means of reproducing the life of Christ in men. The vine shows further, that disciples cannot

¹ Ante, p. 35.

generate new spiritual life alone. They must be attached branches, living and drawing sap from the vine, in order to fit in with Christ's method of fruit-bearing.

4. It makes clear the idea of union with Christ. The symbolism clearly shows that there is no benefit in mere outward acts. The lamb not only must be killed, it must be killed for someone, and its blood applied to the doorposts -- or the heart. The vine and branches are the union of one plant; the shepherd and sheep live in the association of one flock, and their only security is in their essential intimate union. The bread is the symbol of complete appropriation of Christ into the nature of the believer for possession and nourishment by Him.
5. It makes clear the laws that operate in the spiritual realm. It shows that the keys to producing and undergirding the spiritual life are fundamental principles of spiritual natures. As individuals in the natural world stand or fail on the basis of conforming to its laws of operation, so also life in the spiritual realm is based upon realities which are foundational in nature.

The symbol of the light illustrates, for example, the law of illumination from within. The light of Christ shines into the Christian heart and life, and the result is conviction and guidance of personality as to what to do. The amount of light depends upon the willing trust of a person to live

by the guidance or light for the present step, without demanding to see the whole way all at once.

All of these factors involved in the use of symbolism are effectively employed by St. John in his account of Jesus. Without the symbolic expressions, the Fourth Gospel would be much less convincing in its presentation of "the Christ, the Son of God."

D. SYMBOLISM AS AN AID

TO THE READER'S FAITH IN CHRIST

The reader of the Fourth Gospel is faced with the challenge of John's purpose, -- "that you might believe." The book's symbolism is a factor in the response to this challenge.

The significance of the figures is dependent upon a consideration of John's entire method, which has sometimes been said to be prevailingly allegorical,¹ with its truth depending on the ideas and experiences which are symbolized rather than upon the actual events described. While no one challenges the spiritual values of the Gospel, there has been difference of opinion as to its historical approach. With respect to the symbolism, it has earlier been found that the enlightenment of the truth of the spiritual world depends upon a realistic portrayal of the natural world. In other words, symbols do not ordinarily grow out of unrealities.

1. Colwell, Ernest C.: John Defends the Gospel, (New York: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1936) Chapter viii

Allegorical interpretations may be of two kinds, -- pure allegory, in which an incident is constructed or invented for the purpose of serving as the vehicle of the deeper or hidden meaning; and the allegorical meaning drawn out through interpretation from historical events. The latter is a valid use of history, for history, too, is illustrative not only of realities in the natural world, but of the spiritual realm as well, since it is controlled by the living God.¹ St. Paul's interpretation of Old Testament history is a classic example of this use.²

John, too, sees a Christian meaning in Old Testament events, and it is in this connection that many of the symbols are presented. However, they are not to be understood except in the context of their actual Old Testament setting, and thus the factual or historical is as important to interpreting their meaning as is the spiritual truth involved.³

Dr. Bernard sums up the appraisal of John's use of the factual, eyewitness method when he says:

Primarily, the evangelist intended to present narratives of fact, of the truth of which he himself was fully persuaded. He is not only a historian, but he is an interpreter of history, as is shown not only by his comments on his narrative as he proceeds, but also by his selection and arrangement of his materials so as to persuade his readers most effectively of his main thesis. (20:31).⁴

1 Bernard, J. H., op. cit., p. lxxxvi
2 Galatians 4:24, I Corinthians 10:1-11
3 Cf. Bernard, loc. cit.
4 Ibid, p. xc.

The consideration that the symbolism of the Gospel is placed in a factual setting with respect to the events described adds to its validity and significance for the reader.

All the factors which were discussed as contributory to John's own understanding of Christ through the symbols are also applicable to this section. Likewise, the analysis of the elements in symbolism which make clear the truths of Christ is an aid to the reader of St. John in leading him to faith in Jesus.

The simple terms of everyday life in which the symbols are developed is also conducive to faith, because they are settings so common and so meaningful that all can understand. Every child loves the lamb, knows the need of bread, appreciates the value of light and catches the point of leadership and security through the shepherd. The very simplicity of the figures is an aid to faith.

Finally, the symbols are an aid to the reader's faith in Christ because they point forward, generally, into the realm of the heavenly life. It is eternal association which Christ speaks about in the vine-branches attachment; eternal salvation which is obtained by the Lamb of God; eternal leadership of the shepherd, eternal fruitage which is the result of the planting of the wheat. While this is not the whole point of the symbols, the implications are present. The forward pointing is discussed in the Hastings Dictionary:

A review of the entire field brings one decisive feature of the symbolism into prominence. The emblems will all be found

to point onwards to a life beyond the tomb. The symbolism is created by a hope...whose fulfillment is not expected within the limits of our present existence. The justification of this "other-worldliness" may readily be found in our records of the life of Christ.¹

E. SUMMARY

In John's understanding of Christ, the strategic center is the resurrection. This stupendous event challenged the disciples to an understanding of the Lord, and also unfolded the central spiritual truth so that the basic meanings of the symbols in which He had brought forth much of His teaching could be grasped. The inherent character of symbolism was relevant to this understanding, because:

1. It serves to make the abstract concrete.
2. It aids the memory.
3. It stimulates reflection as to meaning.
4. It shows a unity between the spiritual and the natural world.
5. It assists in relating the Gospel to the previous history of redemption.

John employs the symbolic figures which Jesus used, selecting them as important testimony in his presentation of Jesus as the Christ the source of life. Their importance in John's selection is noted when it is seen that he alone of all the Evangelists includes any of this material.

¹ Hastings, James, op. cit., Vol. XII. p. 138.

The symbolism aids in the purpose of the Gospel as stated by John, in that it makes clear:

1. The relation of Christ to humanity.
2. The purpose of an atoning death.
3. The Christian method of producing new life.
4. The idea of union with Christ.
5. The laws that operate in the spiritual world.

The reader of the Gospel is aided to come to faith in Christ by the characteristics of symbolism which have been set forth in the two numbered outlines above, and also by the recognition that:

1. The Gospel is placed in a factual, not an allegorical setting.
2. The figures are in the simplest terms of everyday life familiar to young and old.
3. The symbols point forward to the eternal consummation of life, and cannot be limited to a finite outlook.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY

The purpose of this study has been to analyze the value and significance of symbolism in the presentation of the message of the Fourth Gospel. In conveying spiritual truth, it was found that its meanings must be transmitted through the medium of the natural world which men can comprehend. Consequently the Scripture often uses figures or symbols of the natural world to explain the spiritual world by representation rather than by definitive analysis.

Essential factors of the symbol were found to be (1) a visible sign or token; (2) a spiritual reality or abstract idea; and (3) the representation of the spiritual by the concrete, with the implication of joining them together so as to make the spiritual itself concrete.

Analysis was made of the reasons for the use of symbolism, and the laws and limitations governing its interpretation. As a more or less natural vehicle or tool of expression, the interpretation of the symbol is to be kept within the framework of the major laws of interpreting the Scripture.

The historical development of the subject was analyzed, in which it was found that the use of symbols fitted into the understanding of the Jewish people; that they were used by Jesus in a natural way with emphasis on spiritual lessons of His redemptive mission; and that John employs them in his development of the witness to Christ in the Fourth Gospel.

Through a study of selected individual symbols in St. John, some of the major spiritual ideas which they convey have been pondered. Illustrating the personal character of Jesus were the figures of the grain of wheat and the towel. These are illustrative of attitudes: of the willingness of Christ to spend His life in order to release it into the lives of men; and of His willing humility and spirit of compassionate action. In the development these are qualities which are elicited from the disciple as well as portrayed in Christ.

Symbols representing the redemptive mission of Christ which were developed, were the lamb, the bread, the light, and the cross. These pointed respectively to the atoning sacrifice of Christ which takes away the world's sins; to the Divine flesh and blood of Christ as the bread given for nourishment for the world's spiritual needs; to the light which is Christ as the illumination and guidance for the world's progress on life's way; and to the lifting up of Christ upon the cross as the means of making His life available to every man.

The relationship of Christ with those who are His own was noted in the study of the good shepherd and his sheep; and the

vine and branches. The first was seen to be the symbol of leadership by intimate knowledge and the motive of the leader's unmitigating concern; the second the figure of Christ's method of producing fruit by the unity of living attachment to Himself.

In analyzing the significance of symbolism with respect to its place in the impact of the Gospel message, it was found that it has the result of enlightening the understanding of Christ with respect to various factors which are listed in detail in the summary for Chapter V.¹

B. CONCLUSION

The study of symbolism and its significance in the Fourth Gospel has led to some definite conclusions.

Symbolism is an effective instrument for portraying great spiritual realities in everyday terms of actuality. It uses these terms of natural life in a natural rather than an inventive manner, to portray the realities of the spiritual realm out of the realities of the natural world.

The figures used by St. John play an important part in the portrayal of his message. They have been chosen with careful selection, and their significance as symbols is increased by the fact that John alone has chosen them from the great number of other actions of Jesus which were at his command.

1 Ante, p. 97, 98.

The symbols emphasize the character of Christ in His redemptive mission, as they bear directly upon it; or show how this mission is at the heart of His personal character; or point to it as the basis for the association of His people with Him.

The inherent personal character of life in Christ is brought out by the figures, not alone in Chapter IV, but throughout. It is emphatically shown that appropriation and use of the gracious work and invitation of Christ is the only way to enter into His blessings.

The symbolism points forward to the heavenly life, having always an "other-worldliness" as one of its characteristics, especially whenever the earthly figure can no longer carry the concept of the spiritual reality. This over-stepping of the figure always happens, for no symbolism is able to entirely circumscribe the spiritual meaning. Out of the earth, then, is the mind taken, but not into the full comprehension of heaven.

"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him."¹ There, where the Scripture leaves the people of God, on heaven's threshold, safe in the fellowship of the Redeeming Saviour, there the Bible's symbolism leaves them, too.

1 I Corinthians 2:9 (Phillips).

- Gloag, Paton J. Introduction to the Johannine Writings. London, James Nisbet and Company, 1891.
- Godet, F. Commentary on St. John's Gospel. Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1900.
- Hayes, Doremus A. The Resurrection Fact. Nashville, Tennessee, Cokesbury Press, 1932.
- Kretzmann, Paul E. Popular Commentary on the Bible. St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, 1921.
- Lenski, R. C. H. Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, Columbus, Ohio, Lutheran Book Concern, 1942.
- Oursler, Fulton The Greatest Story Ever Told. Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday and Company, 1949.
- Peyton, William W. The Memorabilia of Jesus. London, Adam and Charles Black, 1892.
- Schaff, Philip. Lange's Commentary on St. John. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906.
- Trench, Richard C. Notes on the Miracles. New York, The Fleming H. Revell Company.
- Weiss, Bernhard Biblical Theology of the New Testament. Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, (1879).
- Westcott, B. F. The Gospel According to St. John. Grand Rapids, Michigan, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950 Edition.
- Westcott, B. F. The Revelation of the Father. London and New York, The MacMillan Company, 1887.
- White, W. W. Studies in the Gospel by John. New York, The Fleming H. Revell Company, 1895.
- Ylvisaker, Johannes The Gospels. Minneapolis, Minnesota, Augsburg Publishing House, 1932.

2. Symbolism

- Benson, George W. The Cross, Its History and Symbolism Buffalo, N. Y., Privately printed, 1934.
- Clement, Clara Erskine Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints. New York, Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1895.
- Fairbairn, Patrick The Typology of Scripture. New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1900, Vol. I.
- Farbridge, Maurice H. Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company, 1923.
- Fleming, Daniel Johnson Christian Symbols in a World Community. New York, Friendship Press, 1940.
- Habershon, Ada R. The Study of the Types. London, Morgan and Scott. No date.
- Jones, William A Course of Lectures on the Figurative Language of the Scriptures. London, G. H. H. and J. Robinson, 1789.
- Schuyleman, John L. Symbolisms of the Bible. Boston, Meador Publishing Company, 1942.
- Stafford, Thomas A. Christian Symbolism in the Evangelical Churches. New York - Nashville, Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1942.
- Trevor, George Types and the Antitype. London, J. and C. Mozley, 1864.
- Twining, Louisa Symbols and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art. London, John Murray, Albemarle St., 1885.
- Webber, F. R. Church Symbolism. Cleveland, Ohio, J. J. Jansen, Publisher, 1927.
- Wemyss, Thomas A Key to the Symbolic Language of Scripture. Edinburgh, Thomas Clark, 1840.

Winzen, Damasus

Symbols of Christ, New Testament,
Bethlehem, Connecticut, Regina
Landis, 1948.

3. Encyclopedias and Other Reference Works

New Century Dictionary, New York,
D. Appleton - Century Company,
1934.

Hastings, James

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,
New York, Charles Scribner's Sons,
1925.

Smith, William

Dictionary of the Bible. New York,
D. Appleton and Company, 1893.

Traina, Robert A.

Method in Bible Study and Teaching.
New York, Biblical Seminary Mimeo-
graphed Manual, 1951.

Young, Robert

Analytical Concordance to the Bible.
New York, Funk and Wagnalls Com-
pany, 1936 (22nd Edition).